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THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In the Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM LAURENS COUNTY
Court of Common Pleas

The Honorable Frank R. Addy
Circuit Court Judge

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SC Court of Appeals

Appellant Case No.: 2018-000082

Andrew Young, ... Appellant,

v.

Mark Keel, Chief of the South Carolina
Law Enforcement Division, ... Respondent.

FINAL BRIEF OF RESPONDENT

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ATTORNEY FOR RESPONDENT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents i

Table of Authorities ii

Statement of Issues on Appeal 1

Statement of the Case 1

Standard of Review 2

Argument 3

I. The trial court did not err in denying the Appellant's request for removal from the South Carolina Sex Offender Registry Act (SORA) registry because the Appellant does not meet any of the statutory criteria for removal set forth in SORA. 3

Conclusion 11

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

CASES

Buist v. Huggins, 367 S.C. 268, 625 S.E.2d 636 (2006) 6

Felts v. Richland Cty., 303 S.C. 354, 400 S.E.2d 781 (1991) 2

Hawkins v. Bruno Yacht Sales, Inc., 353 S.C. 31, 577 S.E.2d 202 (2003) 5, 8

Hendrix v. Taylor, 353 S.C. 542, 579 S.E.2d 320 (2003) 9

Hodges v. Rainey, 341 S.C. 79, 533 S.E.2d 578 (2000) 2, 5

In re Ronnie A., 355 S.C. 407, 585 S.E.2d 311 (2003) 9

In the Interest of Justin B., a Juvenile under the Age of Seventeen, 419 S.C. 575, 799 S.E.2d 675 (2017) 9, 10

Johnson v. Lloyd, 399 S.C. 470, 476–77, 732 S.E.2d 198, 201 (Ct. App. 2012), *overruled on other grounds by* Johnson v. Lloyd, 407 S.C. 610, 757 S.E.2d 705 (2014) 4

Key Corporate Capital, Inc. v. County of Beaufort, 373 S.C. 55, 644 S.E.2d 675 (2007) 6, 7, 10

Keyserling v. Beasley, 322 S.C. 83, 470 S.E.2d 100 (1996) 7

Lozada v. South Carolina Law Enforcement Div., 395 S.C. 509, 719 S.E.2d 258 (2011)..2

Santee Cooper Resort, Inc. v. S. Carolina Pub. Serv. Comm'n, 298 S.C. 179, 379 S.E.2d 119 (1989) 6, 10

State v. Corey D., 339 S.C. 107, 529 S.E.2d 20 (2000) 7

S.C. Dep't of Consumer Affairs v. Rent-A-Ctr., Inc., 345 S.C. 251, 547 S.E.2d 881 (Ct. App. 2001). 5

State v. Walls, 348 S.C. 26, 558 S.E.2d 524 (2002) 3, 9

WDW Properties v. City of Sumter, 342 S.C. 6, 535 S.E.2d 631 (2000) 2

CONSTITUTION

S.C. Const. art. I, § 8 .... 6, 10

STATUTES

S.C. Code Ann. § 16-15-140 .... 1, 3

S.C. Code Ann. § 22-5-920 .... 7, 8

S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-400 .... 1, 9

S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430 .... 1, 3, 4, 5, 8

S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-450 7

S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-460 .... 3, 6

S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-490 .... 7, 8

S.C. Code Ann. § 24-19-5 1

OTHER AUTHORITIES

Black's Law Dictionary 602 (7th ed. 1999) 5

STATEMENT OF ISSUES ON APPEAL

I. **The trial court did not err in denying the Appellant's request for removal from the South Carolina Sex Offender Registry Act (SORA) registry because the Appellant does not meet any of the statutory criteria for removal set forth in SORA.**

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

The Appellant pled guilty to the offense of Lewd Act on a Minor in violation of § 16-15-140 of the South Carolina Code of Laws in 1995. (Tr. p. 2)(R. p. 33).[1] The Appellant concedes that this conviction required the Appellant to register as a sex offender pursuant to the South Carolina Sex Offender Registry Act, § 23-3-400 *et seq.* ("SORA") and that the Appellant did in fact so register. (Appellant's Initial Brief p. 5). Subsequently, because the Appellant was sentenced pursuant to the Judge William R. Byars Youthful Offender Act (YOA), § 24-19-5 *et seq.*, the Appellant sought and received an expungement for this offense (Tr. pp. 2-3)(R. pp. 33-34). Nevertheless, the Appellant does not meet any of the statutory criteria for removal set forth in the plain language of SORA. *See* S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(E), (F), (G). (Tr. p. 3)(R. p. 34). Accordingly, the Appellant was notified by the local Sheriff's Office that the Appellant is required to continue registering pursuant to SORA. *Id.*

The Appellant filed a declaratory judgment action on or about May 17, 2017 seeking an order removing the Appellant from the SORA registry. The Honorable Frank R. Addy heard this action on October 2, 2017 and denied the Appellant's request for a declaratory judgment in an order filed on December 19, 2017. This appeal follows.

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[1] The offense of Lewd Act was repealed and recodified as Criminal Sexual Conduct with a Minor in the third degree (S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-655(C)) in 2012. *See* 2012 Act 255.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

"A suit for declaratory judgment is neither legal nor equitable, but is determined by the nature of the underlying issue. An issue essentially one at law will not be transformed into one in equity simply because declaratory relief is sought." Felts v. Richland Cty., 303 S.C. 354, 356, 400 S.E.2d 781, 782 (1991).

"Whether an individual must be placed on the sex offender registry is a question of law." Lozada v. South Carolina Law Enforcement Div., 395 S.C. 509, 512, 719 S.E.2d 258, 259 (2011).

"The cardinal rule of statutory construction is to ascertain and effectuate the intent of the legislature." Hodges v. Rainey, 341 S.C. 79, 85, 533 S.E.2d 578, 581 (2000). "Under the plain meaning rule, it is not the court's place to change the meaning of a clear and unambiguous statute." *Id.*

When an appeal involves stipulated or undisputed facts, an appellate court is free to review whether the trial court properly applied the law to those facts. WDW Properties v. City of Sumter, 342 S.C. 6, 10, 535 S.E.2d 631, 632 (2000).

ARGUMENT

I. The trial court did not err in denying the Appellant's request for removal from the South Carolina Sex Offender Registry Act (SORA) registry because the Appellant does not meet any of the statutory criteria for removal set forth in SORA.

Based on the following, Respondent avers that the trial court correctly denied the Appellant's request for removal from the SORA registry and that the trial court's decision should be affirmed.

STATUTORY AVENUES FOR REMOVAL FROM SORA

The Appellant concedes that he was convicted of Lewd Act on a Minor (formerly S.C. Code Ann. § 16-15-140) in 1995. Since the earliest inception of South Carolina's Sex Offender Registry Act (SORA) registry, this offense has been a mandatory SORA registry offense. *See* S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(c)(11) (1996 Supp.); 1996 South Carolina Laws Act 444 (S.B. 1286). As such, South Carolina law mandates that Appellant register in accordance with SORA.[2] Further, all SORA registration in South Carolina is **for life**. *See* S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-460 (setting forth SORA's lifetime registration requirement in an unambiguously worded statute – to wit: "for life") (emphasis added). Accordingly, regardless of the Appellant's expungement, he is required to continue registering in accordance with SORA for life unless he meets one of the statutorily enumerated grounds for removal. *See* S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(E), (F), (G). However, Appellant concedes he does not. (Tr. p. 3)(R. p. 34).

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[2] South Carolina's SORA applies retroactively. *See* State v. Walls, 348 S.C. 26, 31, 558 S.E.2d 524, 526 (2002) (holding South Carolina's registry constitutional and specifically finding that "the Act does not violate the *ex post facto* clauses of the state or federal constitutions.").

The plain and unambiguous language of SORA sets forth avenues by which an individual's lifetime registration requirement can be removed. *See* S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(E), (F), (G). As noted by the trial court, these are the **only** lawful avenues under which a lifetime registration requirement can be lifted. *See also* Johnson v. Lloyd, 399 S.C. 470, 476–77, 732 S.E.2d 198, 201 (Ct. App. 2012), *overruled on other grounds by* Johnson v. Lloyd, 407 S.C. 610, 757 S.E.2d 705 (2014) ("The General Assembly enacted an unambiguously worded statute that sets forth the legal remedies available to an individual on the [SORA] registry. Because the sex offender registry statute provides an adequate remedy…, it was error for the circuit court to fashion an equitable remedy in this case."). Pursuant to § 23-3-430(E), "SLED shall remove a person's name and any other information concerning that person from the sex offender registry immediately upon notification by the Attorney General that the person's adjudication, conviction, guilty plea, or plea of nolo contendere for an offense listed in subsection (C) was reversed, overturned, or vacated on appeal and a final judgment has been rendered." S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(E). Pursuant to § 23-3-430(F), an offender who receives a pardon "based on a finding of not guilty specifically stated in the pardon" shall be removed. S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(F). And finally, pursuant to § 23-3-430(G) individuals exonerated subsequent to filing a petition for a writ of habeas corpus or a motion for a new trial are removed. S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(F). However, unfortunately for the Appellant, **none of these avenues apply to him**. (Tr. p. 3)(R. p. 34). Simply put, an expungement is not an enumerated ground for removal of an individual's lifetime registration requirement recognized in SORA. As such, the trial court's decision should be affirmed.

It is inarguable that if South Carolina Legislature had intended for an expungement to relieve an individual's SORA registration requirement, the Legislature would have specifically stated such in statute. However, because the Legislature did not, the canon of statutory construction *expressio unius est exclusion alterius*, which holds that to express or include one thing implies the exclusion of another, is determinative. *See* Hodges v. Rainey, 341 S.C. 79, 86, 533 S.E.2d 578, 582 (2000); Black's Law Dictionary 602 (7th ed. 1999). South Carolina courts have noted that this "maxim should be used to accomplish legislative intent [*i.e.* lifetime registration in South Carolina], not defeat it." S.C. Dep't of Consumer Affairs v. Rent-A-Ctr., Inc., 345 S.C. 251, 256, 547 S.E.2d 881, 884 (Ct. App. 2001).

Moreover, YOA expungements came into existence in 2003. *See* 2003 Act No. 1. Since that time, SORA has been amended seven (7) times, including one amendment to the statutory criteria for removal.[3] However, despite these numerous opportunities, not once has the Legislature ever included YOA expungements, or any expungement for that matter, in the list of statutory avenues for removal from lifetime SORA registration. *See* S.C Code Ann. § 23-3-430(E), (F), (G). As such, the legislative intent that a YOA expungement does not relieve an individual's SORA registration requirement is clear and unequivocal. *See* Hawkins v. Bruno Yacht Sales, Inc., 353 S.C. 31, 39, 577 S.E.2d 202, 207 (2003) (acknowledging that the cardinal rule of statutory construction is to ascertain the intent of the legislature and to accomplish that intent.) Accordingly, the trial court was correct.

---

[3] These amendments are: 2004 Act No. 208, § 14; 2005 Act No. 141, § 2; 2008 Act No. 335, § 16, eff June 16, 2008 (amending the criteria for removal set forth in S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-430(F)); 2010 Act No. 212, § 3, eff June 7, 2010; 2010 Act No. 289, § 8, eff June 11, 2010; 2012 Act No. 255, § 5, eff June 18, 2012; 2015 Act No. 7 (S.196), § 6.D, eff April 2, 2015.

In addition, the South Carolina Supreme Court has also held explicitly that a "court's equitable powers **must yield** in the face of an unambiguously worded statute." Santee Cooper Resort, Inc. v. S. Carolina Pub. Serv. Comm'n, 298 S.C. 179, 185, 379 S.E.2d 119, 123 (1989)(emphasis added); *see also* Key Corporate Capital, Inc. v. County of Beaufort, 373 S.C. 55, 644 S.E.2d 675 (2007) (finding error in fashioning an equitable remedy in the face of an unambiguously worded statute). SORA's lifetime registration requirement is set forth in an unambiguously worded statute, *i.e.* "for life". S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-460. As such, there is simply no statutory or equitable relief available in this matter, and the trial court's decision must stand.

Furthermore, for any court to fashion an equitable remedy in the face of an unambiguously worded statue would be a clear violation of the South Carolina Constitution's mandate for the separation of powers. *See* S.C. Const. art. I, § 8. The South Carolina Constitution specifically provides that "the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the government shall be forever separate and distinct from each other, and no person or persons exercising the functions of one of said departments shall assume or discharge the duties of any other." S.C. Const. art. I, § 8. The duration of sex offender registration is a matter of public policy that is solely in the province of the South Carolina Legislature. As such, any attempt by any court to invade the Legislature's exclusive province is a violation of the separation of powers and is unconstitutional. *Id.* In addition, the South Carolina Supreme Court has specifically held that

> [i]f a statute's language is plain, unambiguous, and conveys a clear meaning, the rules of statutory interpretation are not needed and the court has no right to impose another meaning." Buist v. Huggins, 367 S.C. 268, 276, 625 S.E.2d 636, 640 (2006) (internal quotes and citation omitted). Instead, the words of the statute must be given their plain and ordinary meaning without resorting to subtle or forced construction to limit or

> expand the statute's operation. *Id.* Moreover, **"it is beyond this Court's power to effect a change in the statutes enacted by the Legislature."** State v. Corey D., 339 S.C. 107, 120, 529 S.E.2d 20, 27 (2000); *see also* Keyserling v. Beasley, 322 S.C. 83, 86, 470 S.E.2d 100, 101 (1996) (this Court does "**not sit as a superlegislature to second guess the wisdom or folly of decisions of the General Assembly**").

Key Corporate Capital, Inc. v. County of Beaufort, 373 S.C. 55, 59, 644 S.E.2d 675 (2007) (emphasis added). This entire action seeks for this Court to impermissibly and unconstitutionally act as a "superlegislature" and to add language to an unambiguously worded constitutional statute. This is not permitted by South Carolina law. *Id.* As such, the trial court was correct to reject this attempt and should be affirmed.

APPLICATION OF S.C. CODE ANN. § 22-5-920

In addition, Appellant's reliance on S.C. Code Ann. § 22-5-920 is misplaced. An expungement pursuant to this section does not operate as a reversal, overturn, or vacation of the Appellant's conviction on appeal and does not affect the Appellant's overall SORA registration requirement. As correctly noted by the trial court, the Appellant's expungement "does not change or rewrite history; it does not operate to vacate or undo a prior adjudication." (Order Denying Declaratory Judgment p. 3)(R. p. 34). Moreover, § 22-5-920 deals only with the publication of certain arrest and conviction records - nothing more - and certainly not overall SORA registration.

It is axiomatic that actual SORA in-person registration and the publication of SORA conviction information on a website are separate and distinct matters governed by separate and distinct statutes. To that end, S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-450 mandates that offenders "register with the sheriff", and specify that registration entails providing "information as prescribed by SLED." This is SORA registration and is completely unaffected by S.C. Code Ann. § 22-5-920. Separately, S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-490 speaks

to the public accessibility of and the publication of SORA information. To that end, § 23-3-490 states that all "information collected for the offender registry is open to public inspection" and specifically authorizes the use of "computerized or electronic transmission of data or other electronic or similar means" *i.e.* the internet, to accomplish such publication. Accordingly, even assuming *arguendo* that § 22-5-920 could be read to limit the public's access to **all** of the SORA registry information related to the Appellant, which it does not, there is simply no possible way to read § 22-5-920 to authorize the removal the Appellant's separate and distinct lifetime SORA registration requirement. Rather, the only lawful avenues to remove this mandatory lifetime SORA registration requirement are set forth in SORA itself. *See* S.C Code Ann. § 23-3-430(E), (F), (G). However, unfortunately for the Appellant, as the trial court correctly found, none of these avenues are available to the Appellant. *See above*. Accordingly, the Appellant's claims must fail.

Moreover, the proper application of § 22-5-920, which speaks only to the publication of certain arrest and conviction records, requires only that Respondent seal from the public view the actual charge of conviction on the Appellant's publically accessible SORA website entry. Respondent has done such. Accordingly, Respondent is informed and believes that it is in full compliance with both § 22-5-920 and with SORA. However, there is simply no reading of § 22-5-920, a statute dealing only with the publication of records, that can evidence a Legislative intent to remove an individual's overall SORA registration requirement. *See* Hawkins v. Bruno Yacht Sales, Inc., 353 S.C. 31, 39, 577 S.E.2d 202, 207 (2003) (acknowledging that the cardinal rule of statutory construction is to ascertain the intent of the legislature and to accomplish that intent.) Accordingly, the Appellant's argument was correctly rejected by the trial court.

SORA REGISTRATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA IS NOT PUNISHMENT

In South Carolina, Courts have also consistently and unequivocally held that registration pursuant to SORA is **NOT** punishment. *See* State v. Walls, 348 S.C. 26, 31, 558 S.E.2d 524, 526 (2002); Hendrix v. Taylor, 353 S.C. 542, 552, 579 S.E.2d 320, 325 (2003) (finding that "the length of time one must be listed on the sex offender registry is non-punitive, and it cannot constitute a deprivation of a constitutionally protected liberty interest."); In re Ronnie A., 355 S.C. 407, 409, 585 S.E.2d 311, 312 (2003) (finding that "sex offender registration, regardless of the length of time, is non-punitive and therefore no liberty interest is implicated."); In the Interest of Justin B., a Juvenile under the Age of Seventeen, 419 S.C. 575, 799 S.E.2d 675 (2017) (reaffirming the constitutionality of SORA and reaffirming unequivocally that SORA is not punishment).

Rather, the South Carolina Legislature has evidenced a clear intent that SORA is "to promote the state's fundamental right to provide for the public health, welfare, and safety of its citizens" and to "provide law enforcement with the tools needed in investigating criminal offenses." S.C. Code Ann. § 23-3-400. In State v. Walls, the South Carolina Supreme Court noted the following:

> it is clear the General Assembly did not intend to punish sex offenders, but instead intended to protect the public from those sex offenders who may re-offend and to aid law enforcement in solving sex crimes. Hence, the language indicates the General Assembly's intention to create a non-punitive act. We find the Act is not so punitive in purpose or effect as to constitute a criminal penalty. Accordingly, the Act does not violate the *ex post facto* clauses of the state or federal constitutions.

348 S.C. 26, 30-31, 558 S.E.2d 524, 525-26 (2002).

The most recent South Carolina Supreme Court opinion in this area, In the Interest of Justin B., a Juvenile under the Age of Seventeen, 419 S.C. 575, 799 S.E.2d 675 (2017),

is instructive and determinitive. This case involved a challenge by a juvenile offender to mandatory lifetime public registration. *Id.* In denying every challenge to SORA brought before it, the Court, not only provided a comprehensive review of the history of SORA jurisprudence, but also stated the following:

> The requirement that adults and juveniles who commit criminal sexual conduct must register as a sex offender and wear an electronic monitor is not a punitive measure, and the requirement bears a rational relationship to the Legislature's purpose in the Sex Offender Registry Act to protect our citizens—including children—from repeat sex offenders. The requirement, therefore, is not unconstitutional. **If the requirement that juvenile sex offenders must register and must wear an electronic monitor is in need of change, that decision is to be made by the Legislature—not the courts.** The decision of the family court to follow the mandatory, statutory requirement to impose lifetime sex offender registration and electronic monitoring on Justin B. is **AFFIRMED**.

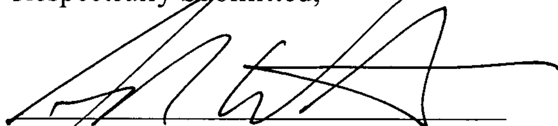
Id. at 586–87, 681 (emphasis added).

Similarly, the Respondent would assert that should South Carolina's SORA laws be in need of amendment to include expungement as an available route for removal from the SORA registry, which Respondent certainly does not concede, that is a decision that can **only** be made by the South Carolina Legislature. *Id.*; S.C. Const. art. I, § 8; Santee Cooper Resort, Inc. v. S. Carolina Pub. Serv. Comm'n, 298 S.C. 179, 379 S.E.2d 119 (1989); Key Corporate Capital, Inc. v. County of Beaufort, 373 S.C. 55, 644 S.E.2d 675 (2007). However, in the absence of such legislative change, there is simply no lawful relief on which the Appellant's claim can be granted. Accordingly, the trial court was correct in denying Appellant's claim, and the trial court's decision should be affirmed and upheld in its entirety.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the foregoing and the applicable laws and jurisprudence of the State of South Carolina, this Court should uphold and affirm the trial court's decision in its entirety.

Respectfully Submitted,



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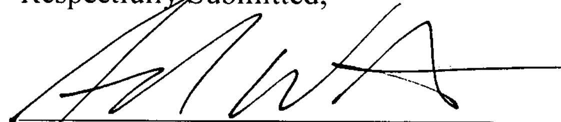
RULE 211(b) CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the Final Brief of Respondents complies with Rule 211(b), SCACR and the August 13, 2007 Supreme Court Order regarding personal identifiers.

Respectfully Submitted,



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