

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
IN THE COURT OF APPEALS

---

**RECEIVED**

**Aug 12 2020**

**SC Court of Appeals**

CERTIORARI TO DORCHESTER COUNTY  
Court of Common Pleas  
The Honorable Benjamin H. Culbertson, PCR Judge  
The Honorable Diane Schafer Goodstein, Plea Judge

---

Appellate Case No. 2017-002021

---

RANDAL WILLIAM BENTON,

Petitioner,

vs.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

Respondent.

---

**BRIEF OF RESPONDENT**

---

ALAN WILSON  
Attorney General

BENJAMIN LIMBAUGH  
Assistant Attorney General  
S.C. Bar No. 103334

Post Office Box 11549  
Columbia, South Carolina 29211  
(803) 734-3737

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENT

**INDEX**

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES.....2

ISSUE PRESENTED.....3

STATEMENT OF THE CASE.....4

STATEMENT OF FACTS.....6

STANDARD OF REVIEW .....13

ARGUMENT .....14

**The PCR court correctly find Petitioner failed to satisfy his burden of proving Counsel was constitutionally ineffective for failing to properly advise Petitioner of the evidence against him prior to his abandoned Alford plea where Petitioner has not alleged with any specificity what evidence counsel did not go over with him, where Petitioner conceded he had been over the evidence with counsel but just “wouldn’t say every bit of it, where the only testimony of evidence not seen by Petitioner pertained to post-mortem photographs of his wife which Petitioner chose not to view, and where there is no evidence the plea judge would have accepted the plea .....14**

CONCLUSION.....18

**TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**

**Cases**

Alford v. North Carolina, 400 U.S. 25 (1970)..... 4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15  
Anders v. California, 386 U.S. 738 (1967).....4  
State v. Benton, Op. No. 2013-UP-400 (Ct. App. 2013).....4  
Smalls v. State, 422 S.C. 174, 179, 810 S.E.2d 836 (2018).....13  
Frierson v. State, 423 S.C. 257, 262 815 S.E.2d 433 (2018).....13  
Webb v. State, 281 S.C. 237, 238, 314 S.E.2d 839 (1984).....13  
Lafler v. Cooper, 566 U.S. 156 (2012).....17  
Missouri v. Frye, 566 U.S. 133 (2012).....17  
Davie v. State, 381 S.C. 601, 675 S.E.2d 416 (2009).....17  
Bell v. State, 410 S.C. 436, 765 S.E.2d 4 (Ct. App. 2014).....17  
Marlar v. State, 375 S.C. 407, 410, 653 S.E.2d 266, 267 (2007).....18  
Pruitt v. State, 310 S.C. 254, 256, 423 S.E.2d 127, 128 (1992).....18  
Burgess v. State, 402 S.C. 92, 95, 738 S.E.2d 264, 265 (Ct. App. 2013).....18

**Rules**

Rule 71.1(f), SCRCF.....11, 13  
Rule 59 (e), SCRCF.....17, 18

### **PETITIONER'S ISSUE PRESENTED**

Did trial counsel render ineffective assistance by failing to advise Petitioner properly prior to attempting to enter his guilty plea where the judge refused to accept the guilty plea because Petitioner indicated he had not reviewed all of the evidence against him and trial counsel admitted to withholding evidence from Petitioner prior to the attempted guilty plea?

### **RESPONDENT'S ISSUE PRESENTED**

Did the PCR court correctly find Petitioner failed to satisfy his burden of proving Counsel was constitutionally ineffective for failing to properly advise Petitioner of the evidence against him prior to his abandoned Alford plea where Petitioner has not alleged with any specificity what evidence counsel did not go over with him, where Petitioner conceded he had been over the evidence with counsel but just "wouldn't say every bit of it, where the only testimony of evidence not seen by Petitioner pertained to post-mortem photographs of his wife which Petitioner chose not to view, and where there is no evidence the plea judge would have accepted the plea?

## STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Petitioner is presently confined in the South Carolina Department of Corrections pursuant to orders of commitment from the Dorchester County Clerk of Court. During its January 2011 term, the Dorchester County Grand Jury indicted Petitioner for murder (2010-GS-18-1675). John M. Loy, Esquire (Counsel), represented Petitioner. Russel D. Hilton, Esquire, and Barney Giese, Esquire, prosecuted the case. Petitioner originally appeared on January 6, 2012, before the Honorable Diane Schafer Goodstein to enter a guilty plea pursuant to Alford v. North Carolina, 400 U.S. 25 (1970). There was to be a negotiated sentence of imprisonment for forty years. Judge Goodstein refused to accept Petitioner's plea.

Petitioner later proceeded to a jury trial before the Honorable Stephanie P. McDonald. Counsel, as well as Michelle R. Suggs, Esquire, represented Petitioner at trial. The jury found Petitioner guilty as indicted. On February 9, 2012, Judge McDonald sentenced Petitioner life imprisonment without parole.

Petitioner filed a timely notice of appeal. Breen R. Stevens, Esquire, of the Office of Appellate Defense, perfected the appeal pursuant to Anders v. California, 386 U.S. 738 (1967). In his Anders brief, Appellate Counsel argued the trial court erred in admitting a hearsay statement of the decedent. On October 30, 2013, the South Carolina Court of Appeals dismissed Petitioner's appeal and granted Appellate Counsel's motion to be relieved. State v. Benton, Op. No. 2013-UP-400 (Ct. App. 2013). The remittitur was issued on November 18, 2013.

On May 23, 2014, Petitioner filed an application for post-conviction relief. An evidentiary hearing into the matter convened on May 18, 2016, before the Honorable Benjamin H. Culbertson. Petitioner was present at the hearing and represented by Rodney D. Davis, Esquire. Assistant

Attorney General J. Clayton Mitchell, III, represented the State. Judge Culbertson denied relief and dismissed the application with prejudice by an order of dismissal filed September 20, 2017.

Petitioner filed a timely notice of appeal on September 28, 2017. Petitioner then filed a petition for writ of certiorari on June 1, 2018. Respondent filed a return to petitioner for writ of certiorari on October 17, 2018.

## STATEMENT OF THE FACTS

Petitioner was convicted of murder after shooting his unarmed wife eight times in a restaurant parking lot. App. p. 129, l. 5-15; p. 147, l. 3-9; p. 267, l. 3-6. Petitioner continued shooting Victim after his first shot brought her to the ground, paused to threaten the multiple eyewitnesses and order them back inside the restaurant, then proceeded to resume shooting Victim in the back. App. 130, l. 15-19; p. 147, l. 4-p. 148, l. 5; p. 161, l. 2-14; p. 164, l. 9-14; p. 274, l. 9-18; p. 275, l. 12-15; p. 277, l. 20-24.

Petitioner and Victim were married but had been separated for approximately six months when the murder occurred on October 30, 2010. App. 330, l. 1-11. Earlier that day, Petitioner and other family members had helped Victim move belongings into a storage unit as she prepared to move. App. 222, l. 1-20. Later that day, Petitioner returned to a residence of Victim's at which they had previously lived together to find she was not there. Victim's neighbor was standing outside and mentioned Petitioner had "just missed them." App. 218, l. 5-14. Victim's neighbor testified at trial Petitioner remarked, "She is probably with her damn boyfriend," and sped off in his two-tone blue and silver Chevrolet truck. App. 218, l. 12-23. Petitioner, smelling of alcohol, later appeared at the back porch of Victim's condominium where her son was residing and asked if Victim could drive him home. App. 224, l. 6-23. While Petitioner testified he asked Victim for a ride home because he was intoxicated and feeling strange after a recent altercation at a bowling alley, Victim's son testified Petitioner asked for a ride home claiming his truck had broken down. App. 225, l. 15-19; p. 351, l. 1-10. Victim agreed to come and drive Petitioner home but instructed her son to call her cell phone if she did not return in twenty minutes, and to call the police if there was no answer. App. 228, l. 8-25.

An argument ensued during the drive as Petitioner began to angrily question Victim about whether she had been spending time with a male friend with whom Petitioner suspected she was

romantically involved. App. 357, l. 13-p. 359, l. 13. Victim eventually pulled over in the restaurant parking lot, where the two were seen arguing in the truck by numerous bystanders including restaurant employees. App. 125, l. 18-21; p. 144, l. 22-p.145, l. 6; p. 164, l. 4-8.

They exited the vehicle and continued arguing while Victim pleaded with Petitioner to leave her alone. App. 127, l. 5-11; p. 146, l. 12-25. Trial testimony indicated there was no physical struggle, only Petitioner aggressively “coming toward” Victim, and Victim acting defensively, at which point Petitioner’s baseball cap was knocked off. App. 127, l. 23-p. 128, l. 2; p 154, l. 1-20. The argument persisted, and eventually employees walked outside to ask them to take the argument elsewhere. App. 126, l. 24-p 127, l. 4; p. 146, l. 5-9.

As Victim asked Petitioner to leave her alone, he drew his gun and shot her dead. App. 129, l. 2-17; p. 147, l. 4-9; p. 164, l. 9-14. Victim fell to the ground when she was first shot. App. 129, l. 10-17; p. 161, l. 10-14. Petitioner then threatened the employees who had walked outside and instructed them to go back inside. App. 130, l. 15-19; p. 147, l. 4-14; p. 164, l. 9-14. Two eyewitnesses testified Petitioner had fired three or four shots before pausing to threaten the girls and then returned to fire more shots into Victim. App. 147, l. 15-p. 148, l. 5; p. 161, l. 3-14; p. 164, l. 11-14. All total, Victim was shot eight times including one shot through her eye and multiple shots in her back. App. 269, l. 22-25; p. 274, l. 9-p. 277, l. 24.

Police officers eventually made contact with Victim’s son who feared for his mother’s safety and was walking down the road with a baseball bat. App. 229, l. 18-p. 230, l. 5. Victim’s son gave law enforcement a description of Petitioner including what he was wearing, which matched the eyewitness descriptions from the restaurant, at which time officers drove him to the restaurant parking lot where his mother had been killed. App. 230, l. 10-p. 231, l. 1.

Petitioner was eventually apprehended at a convenience store in Alabama next day when he called his mother from the clerk's cell phone, and his mother informed the clerk Petitioner was wanted for murder in South Carolina. The clerk then pressed the panic button and law enforcement arrived to arrest Petitioner. App. 567, l. 9-23. Petitioner's truck, which matched the descriptions given by the witnesses and had a tag listed in NCIC as being driven by a homicide suspect, was seized, and law enforcement found Petitioner's Smith & Wesson Sigma Series 9mm pistol. App. 238, l. 10-12; p. 246, l. 6-10. SLED verified that all four bullets recovered at the crime scene were fired from this gun. App. 308, l. 9-18. SLED also found enough matching characteristics to conclude all eight of the cartridges cases recovered at the scene were fired by this gun. App. 308, l. 25-p. 309, l. 3. Law enforcement also obtained a buccal swab from Petitioner, which matched the DNA on the baseball cap that fell off the shooter's head at the crime scene. App. 294, l. 20-25.

#### *Rejected Guilty Plea*

Petitioner originally appeared on January 6, 2012, before the Honorable Diane Schafer Goodstein to enter a guilty plea pursuant to Alford v. North Carolina, 400 U.S. 25 (1970), with a negotiated sentence of imprisonment for forty years. App. 3, l. 1. At the guilty plea hearing, Counsel told Judge Goodstein he "certainly" believed the State could produce sufficient evidence to convict and establish Petitioner's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and he concurred with Petitioner's decision to plead guilty. App. 4, l. 20-p. 5, l. 1.

Judge Goodstein instructed Petitioner to not answer a question that he did not understand and to let her know if he did not understand something. App. 5, l. 15-21. Moreover, Judge Goodstein explained there are many ways to "explain any one thing," and she would be happy to try to explain things in a different way if Petitioner did not understand the question. App. 5, l. 19-24. Petitioner was also told to feel free to take a break and talk with counsel at any point in the proceeding. App. 5, l. 25-p. 6, l. 6.

Judge Goodstein thoroughly explained the concept of an Alford plea to Petitioner, and Petitioner affirmed he still wanted to plead guilty under Alford. App. 14, l. 3-p. 15, l. 11. Petitioner asserted he wished to waive his constitutional rights in order to plead guilty. App. 18, l. 11-13.

The solicitor recited the facts of the case and described the DNA evidence, ballistics evidence, and the testimony which the State later presented at trial. App. 20, l. 9-p. 26, l. 6. In fact, Petitioner testified at trial and claimed to have “blacked out” immediately before the shooting, but he did not challenge any of the facts recited by the solicitor except for a minor point about Petitioner having smashed a picture of himself and Victim the night before the murder and the conversation he had with Victim’s neighbor. App. 21, l. 7-11; p. 392, l. 16-24. Petitioner later testified at trial the picture had been broken for days before the incident. App. 392, l. 23.

Nevertheless, when Judge Goodstein asked Petitioner whether those were the facts for which he believed the State could produce sufficient evidence to convict him and establish his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, Petitioner replied, “I don’t know, Your Honor.” App. 26, l. 13-17. Judge Goodstein asked again, “And are those the facts for which you believe you would be found guilty?” Petitioner then asserted, “Yes ma’am.” App. 26, l. 18-20. The exchange prompted Judge Goodstein to ask why Petitioner did not know if those were the facts which he believed the State had evidence to support, and inquired whether he had reviewed the evidence the State had available. App. 26, l. 21-25. Petitioner answered he had reviewed the State’s evidence with his lawyer. App. 27, l. 1-4. However, when Judge Goodstein asked whether he had been over “every bit” of that evidence, Petitioner answered, “No ma’am, I wouldn’t say every bit of it.” App. 27, l. 5-7. At that point, Judge Goodstein announced: “I’m not going to take the plea. If he doesn’t know the evidence and he can’t tell me if he believes that that’s the evidence that the State has and he’s been over it and he thinks there’s evidence he hadn’t been over I can’t take the plea.” App. 27, l.

11-15. Petitioner eventually proceeded to a jury trial the next month in February 2012 before the Honorable Stephanie P. McDonald.

### **RELEVANT PCR TESTIMONY**

At the evidentiary hearing convened May 18, 2016, the PCR court heard testimony from Petitioner and Counsel. After observing the witnesses, the PCR court found Counsel's testimony to be credible and persuasive. App. 592. By contrast, the PCR court found Petitioner's testimony and assertions to be not credible. App. 592.

#### *Petitioner*

Petitioner testified he met with Counsel "two or three times" prior to his abandoned guilty plea and had not reviewed all the discovery prior to his guilty plea. App. 522, l. 21-p. 523, l. 5; p. 525, l. 13-16. According to Petitioner, Counsel did not attempt reschedule the guilty plea before another judge. App. 523, l. 24-p. 524, l. 15.

Petitioner voiced his disagreement with what he perceived to be the State's characterization at trial of the broken picture of Petitioner and Victim found in Petitioner's bedroom. As Petitioner explained, "Best I can gather... they were trying to establish that I had destroyed a picture of my wife earlier that evening..." App. 535, l. 4-18.

On cross-examination, Petitioner conceded he understood the general evidence against him including the restaurant employees who were going to testify against him, as well as the gun found in his truck which matched the bullets fired at the Victim. App. 551, l. 1-8. Petitioner then conceded it was fair to say he had a general understanding, "maybe just not every little detail." App. 551, l. 9-11. When asked which portion of the evidence he had not reviewed before his abandoned guilty plea, Petitioner testified he was unable to "give a definite amount" or "answer to how much he did not study." App. 550, l. 15-25. At no time did Petitioner articulate or specify any evidence he was not apprised of prior to his abandoned guilty plea.

### *Counsel*

Counsel testified he advised Petitioner to accept the plea deal for a negotiated sentence for forty years. App. 553, l. 18-22. Counsel testified he would have discussed the plea deal in chambers, and he “probably pushed pretty hard with both [the judge] and the State to get it through.” App. 554, l. 1-8. Counsel recalled having difficulty reaching a plea agreement and explained the solicitors wanted to try the case, and the judge did not want to accept the plea either. App. 555, l. 14-20. Counsel noted there was no attempt to resurrect the plea deal contained in the transcript. However, Counsel recalled the plea judge did not want to accept the plea, and she was not pleased with it being put forward at all, being an Alford plea to murder and a negotiated forty years. App. 554, l. 1-5. Nevertheless, Counsel testified he suspected he tried to rehabilitate the plea deal in chambers, but “the plea judge essentially banged the gavel and said I’m not taking this plea. We’re done.” App. 554, l. 9-17. While Counsel could not specifically remember if the State held the plea deal open, Counsel testified the State wanted to try the case, so it was unlikely they agreed to keep the offer open. App. 565, l. 16-21.

Regarding Petitioner’s claim that he had not seen all the evidence, Counsel testified he suspected Petitioner was referring to the pictures from Victim’s autopsy. App. 554, l. 18-22. Counsel explained he told Petitioner they were not something Petitioner would want to see because, although Petitioner killed his wife, Counsel believed Petitioner still very much loved her. App. 554, l. 22-p. 555, l. 1. Counsel testified he did not feel this was enough reason for the guilty plea not to go forward, but it was enough for the judge to say that she would not accept it. App. 555, l. 1-4. Counsel pointed out the judge could easily have asked Petitioner what he had not seen, and Counsel could have showed Petitioner the pictures. App. 555, l. 7-9. Counsel noted Petitioner had previously expressed to Counsel that he did not want to see the photos of his deceased wife. App. 554, l. 23.

Counsel described the substantial evidence against Petitioner to the PCR court and remarked that any credibility Petitioner had would have been destroyed if Petitioner claimed he was not the shooter, as the State was definitely going to be able to prove Petitioner shot Victim. App. 574, l. 11-p. 576, l. 3. As Counsel explained, the plea fell through because the judge did not want to accept the plea before they ever entered the courtroom, the State wanted to try the case, “and when Judge McDonald came to town it was first up for trial.” App. 555, l. 16-20.

## STANDARD OF REVIEW

This Court gives great deference to the PCR court's findings of fact and will uphold them if there is evidence in the record to support them. Smalls v. State, 422 S.C. 174, 179, 810 S.E.2d 836 (2018). Pure questions of law are reviewed de novo, and the reviewing court will reverse the PCR court only if its decision is controlled by an error of law. Id.; Frierson v. State, 423 S.C. 257, 262 815 S.E.2d 433 (2018). However, "any evidence" of probative value to support the PCR court's findings of fact is sufficient to uphold those findings on appeal. Webb v. State, 281 S.C. 237, 238, 314 S.E.2d 839 (1984).

## ARGUMENT

**The PCR court correctly found Petitioner failed to satisfy his burden of proving Counsel was constitutionally ineffective for failing to properly advise Petitioner of the evidence against him prior to his abandoned Alford plea where Petitioner has not alleged with any specificity what evidence counsel did not go over with him, where Petitioner conceded he had been over the evidence with counsel but just “wouldn’t say every bit of it, where the only testimony of evidence not seen by Petitioner pertained to post-mortem photographs of his wife which Petitioner chose not to view, and where there is no evidence the plea judge would have accepted the plea**

Petitioner argues Counsel was constitutionally ineffective for allegedly failing to properly apprise Petitioner of all the evidence against him prior to attempting to enter a guilty plea, and thereby causing the judge to accept the guilty plea because Petitioner indicated he had not reviewed all of the evidence against him. According to Petitioner, trial counsel admitted “withholding evidence” from Petitioner prior to the attempted guilty plea. PWC. 13. However, Petitioner has presented no probative evidence to support this allegation. Petitioner has never specified which evidence Counsel allegedly did not review with him and, in fact, during the guilty plea hearing, Petitioner initially conceded Counsel *had* reviewed the evidence with him. App. 27, l. 1. Petitioner further affirmed his belief the State could produce sufficient evidence to convict him of the facts alleged. The only evidence Counsel recalled not reviewing with Petitioner prior to the guilty plea was Victim’s autopsy photographs, which Petitioner knew existed, and he made an affirmative decision not to see them. Moreover, Petitioner has failed to offer a reasonable course of action Counsel failed to take in light of the circumstances of Petitioner’s guilty plea. Counsel negotiated an offer from the State they were not pleased to offer, the plea judge gave no indication she was willing to accept the plea, the plea judge did not provide Counsel with an opportunity to explain, and the timing of the guilty plea shows that there was not an opportunity to appear before another judge with the case being tried the next week. Counsel conveyed the plea offer to Petitioner, Petitioner accepted it knowingly and voluntarily, Petitioner was aware of the autopsy photographs

and agreed to plea without reviewing them, and the autopsy photographs had no bearing on any issue in the case. There was no issue as to the cause of death and Petitioner failing to review the autopsy photographs is in no way prejudicial. Further, judges are free to reject plea agreements, especially one where there is a negotiated sentence that does not allow for any discretion. Ultimately, Petitioner has failed to show how Counsel was in any way constitutionally ineffective for properly reviewing the relevant evidence with Petitioner prior to his plea or how any prejudice resulted where the plea judge was free to reject the plea agreement and showed no indication she was willing to accept the agreement at any point. Therefore, the PCR court correctly found Petitioner failed to carry his burden of proving Counsel was deficient or that he was prejudiced by any alleged deficiency, and certiorari should be denied.

First, Petitioner has failed to present any evidence to support or corroborate his allegation and has failed to specify what evidence counsel allegedly failed to review with him. Petitioner was questioned as to which portion of the State's evidence he had not reviewed prior to the guilty plea, Petitioner answered, 'I can't, I can't really give you a definite amount or answer to how much I did or did not study.' App. 550, l. 22-25. Petitioner then conceded he understood the general evidence against him including the restaurant employees who were going to testify against him as well as the gun found in his truck matching the ballistics of the bullets fired into the victim. App. 551, l. 1-10. Petitioner initially told the plea judge that counsel did review the evidence with him and he believed the State could produce sufficient evidence to convict him of the facts alleged. App. 26, l. 13-p.27, l. 4. It was only when the plea judge further inquired if he had reviewed "every bit" of the evidence that Petitioner answered, "I wouldn't say every bit of it." App. 26, l. 21-p.27, l. 7. The only evidence presented during the evidentiary hearing was the testimony of Petitioner's counsel. At no point during the proceeding did Counsel testify that he was certain as to what

evidence Petitioner was referring to at the plea proceeding. However, counsel testified he suspected Petitioner was referring to the post-mortem pictures of the victim. App. 554, l. 18-22. Counsel explained that while Petitioner may have killed his wife, he believed Petitioner loved her and the pictures were graphic. App. 554, l. 23-25. Counsel further recalled that he warned Petitioner about the pictures, and Petitioner agreed he did not want to see them. App. 554, l. 18-p. 555, l. 4. Other than this testimony about the possibility Petitioner was referring to pictures of his wife, there was no further testimony regarding the unspecified evidence which Petitioner alleges he had not seen.

Therefore, Counsel was not deficient nor the cause of the plea judge refusing to accept Petitioner's plea. Not only did Counsel properly review the evidence with Petitioner, Counsel also recalled attempting to rehabilitate the plea offer. Counsel was not successful due to the plea judge's unwillingness to reconsider and the State's strong desire to try the case; however, simply because Counsel was unable to negotiate a favorable outcome does not make Counsel constitutionally ineffective.

Counsel testified at the evidentiary hearing that although there was no record of an attempt to rehabilitate the plea offer on the record, he believed those discussions took place in chambers. App. 553, l. 23-p. 554, l. 10. Counsel testified he "probably pushed pretty hard with both her and the State to get the offer through." App. 554, l. 6-8. Counsel further testified that he believed that the plea judge never wanted to accept the plea, considering that it was an Alford plea to murder for a negotiated forty years, and she was displeased that it was before her. App. 554, l. 1-6. Counsel elaborated in his testimony that "[t]he plea judge essentially banged the gavel and said I'm not taking this plea.... We're done," after Petitioner stated that he had not seen every bit of evidence. App. 554, l. 14-17. Counsel ultimately testified that it was a challenge negotiating a plea deal

originally, and when it did not go forward, the State wanted to try the case and the plea judge did not want to accept it. App. 555, l. 16-20.

Petitioner's reliance on Lafler v. Cooper, 566 U.S. 156 (2012), Missouri v. Frye, 566 U.S. 133 (2012), Davie v. State, 381 S.C. 601, 675 S.E.2d 416 (2009), and Bell v. State, 410 S.C. 436, 765 S.E.2d 4 (Ct. App. 2014) is misguided. The holdings in Frye, Davie, and Bell focused explicitly on factual scenarios in which plea counsel failed to communicate plea offers to defendants. The facts and allegation in the case at bar are not synonymous with an uncommunicated plea offer, and there is no allegation the offer in this case was not communicated. Conversely, there was testimony from Counsel that it was a challenge to even get Petitioner the plea offer, and he attempted to rehabilitate the offer after Petitioner's miscommunication with the judge caused the plea to fall through. App. 553, l. 23- p. 554, l. 10.

In Lafler, the Court examined whether the applicant received ineffective assistance of counsel when he rejected a plea offer based on counsel's erroneous advice the State would not be able to prove malice because he had shot the victim below the waist. 556 U.S. at 160. It appears Petitioner is citing Lafler to support his argument that Counsel was ineffective for failing to advise Petitioner that he needed to review all of the evidence for the plea to be accepted.

Finally, Petitioner argues that counsel was ineffective for failing to argue that failing to review all of the evidence is not a basis for rejecting the plea. Respondent submits this argument is not preserved and is not before this Court for consideration. The particular issue was only mentioned briefly during Petitioner's examination of Counsel and was not addressed as an allegation in the Order of Dismissal. Further, Petitioner failed to file a Rule 59(e) motion to properly preserve the issue, presuming it was an issue that he intended to argue. Issues must be raised to the PCR judge and ruled on by the PCR judge to be preserved for appellate review. See

Marlar v. State, 375 S.C. 407, 410, 653 S.E.2d 266, 267 (2007); See also Pruitt v. State, 310 S.C. 254, 256, 423 S.E.2d 127, 128 (1992). The court shall make specific findings of fact, and state expressly its conclusions of law, relating to each issue presented. S.C. Code § 17-27-80. Only final judgments or decisions may be reviewed by this Court in PCR actions. S.C. Code § 17-27-100; Rule 71.1(f), SCRCF. In the event the PCR judge fails to make specific findings of fact and conclusions of law regarding an issue, it is incumbent upon a party to file a Rule 59(e), SCRCF motion to properly preserve an issue for appellate review. Burgess v. State, 402 S.C. 92, 95, 738 S.E.2d 264, 265 (Ct. App. 2013) (citing Marlar, 375 S.C. at 410, 653 S.E.2d at 267 (finding issues not preserved for appellate review because the PCR applicant did not make a Rule 59(e) motion asking the PCR judge to make specific findings of fact and conclusions of law on his allegations)). Therefore, there is ample evidence to support the PCR court's finding that Petitioner has not met his burden of proving ineffective assistance of counsel, and therefore certiorari should be denied.

### **CONCLUSION**

For the foregoing reasons, this Court should deny Petitioner's petition for writ of certiorari.

*Signature on following page*

Respectfully submitted,

ALAN WILSON  
Attorney General

BENJAMIN H. LIMBAUGH  
Assistant Attorney General

BY: s/ Benjamin Limbaugh  
Benjamin Limbaugh  
S.C. Bar No. 103334  
Office of the Attorney General  
Post Office Box 11549  
Columbia, SC 29211-1549  
(803) 734-4124

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENT

August 12, 2020

Columbia, South Carolina

**From:** Benjamin Limbaugh  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 12, 2020 5:02 PM  
**To:** shackett@sccid.sc.gov  
**Subject:** Benton BOR  
**Attachments:** BENTON Randal - BOR (02350756xD2C78).pdf

Good afternoon Ms. Hackett,

I hope you're doing well. I have attached my BOR for Randal Benton. If there is anything else that you need please let me know.

Thank you,  
Ben



**Benjamin Limbaugh**  
**A.A.G.**  
**Post-Conviction Relief**  
**Section**

**S.C. Attorney General's**  
**Office**  
Rembert C. Dennis Building  
1000 Assembly St.  
Columbia, SC 29201  
(803)-734-4124  
[blimbaugh@scag.gov](mailto:blimbaugh@scag.gov)

**RECEIVED**

**Aug 12 2020**

**SC Court of Appeals**