

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE

Hill v. Gonzalez

Hill · No. No. 252, 2025 · Decided December 18, 2025

SUMMARY

The Delaware Supreme Court affirmed the Family Court’s dismissal of Luciana Hill’s petition to modify custody and denial of her motion for reargument. The Court held that Hill was not entitled to summary judgment because a genuine factual dispute existed regarding the child’s well-being, and that her refusal to affirm the truthfulness of her testimony prevented the Family Court from finding the statutory basis required for custody modification.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of Delaware
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Collins J. Seitz, Jr., Chief Justice; Valihura, Justice; Traynor, Justice
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of the State of Delaware
DECIDED	December 18, 2025
DOCKET	No. 252, 2025
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Mother appealed the Family Court's dismissal of her petition to modify custody and denial of her motion for reargument, as well as denial of her motion for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Supreme Court reviews the Family Court's factual and legal determinations, inferences, and deductions. It will not disturb factual findings supported by the record when the court's explanations, deductions, and inferences reflect orderly and logical reasoning. Legal rulings are reviewed de novo; when the Family Court correctly applied the law, the ruling is reviewed for abuse of discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published
PARTIES	Luciana Hill v. Diego Gonzalez

TOPICS

- child custody
- summary judgment
- evidence
- appellate procedure
- standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

family law

appellate procedure

evidence

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Family Court properly denied Mother's motion for summary judgment when Father had filed an answer denying allegations that he harmed the child.
2. Whether the Family Court properly dismissed Mother's custody-modification petition when she refused to take an oath or affirmation concerning the truthfulness of her testimony.
3. Whether the Family Court's rulings exhibited bias or discrimination against Mother's religious beliefs.

HOLDINGS

1. The Family Court properly denied Mother's motion for summary judgment because Father's answer created a genuine issue of material fact concerning the child's well-being in Father's care.
2. A witness's religious beliefs do not exempt the witness from the requirement to take an oath or affirmation before testifying; a witness with conscientious scruples against an oath may instead declare and affirm.
3. The Family Court properly dismissed Mother's custody-modification petition because her refusal to affirm the truthfulness of her testimony left no basis for finding the statutory condition required for modification: that continued enforcement of the existing custody order might endanger the child's physical health or significantly impair the child's emotional development.
4. The Family Court did not exhibit bias or discriminate against Mother's religious beliefs in denying summary judgment and dismissing the custody-modification petition.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“if the movant shows that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.” (¶ 9)

“give an oath or affirmation to testify truthfully...in a form designed to impress that duty on the witness’s conscience” (¶ 10)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The parties are the parents of a child born in May 2020, and the Family Court previously awarded them joint legal custody and shared residential placement. Mother filed multiple custody-modification petitions alleging that the child had suffered injuries, psychological distress, and a hospitalization, and sought sole custody and primary residential placement. At the custody hearing, Mother declined to affirm the truthfulness of her testimony and asked the court to revoke its jurisdiction based on her belief that she and the child were not subject to the court’s jurisdiction.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Delaware Family Court awarded the parents joint legal custody and shared residential placement. Mother later filed emergency and non-emergency petitions seeking sole custody and primary residential placement, a motion for summary judgment, and a motion for reargument. The Family Court denied the emergency requests and summary-judgment motion, dismissed the custody-modification petition after a hearing, and denied reargument. The Supreme Court of Delaware affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Wife (J.F.V.) v. Husband (O.W.V., Jr.), 402 A.2d 1202, 1204 (Del. 1979)
- Forrester v. Forrester, 953 A.2d 175, 179 (Del. 2008)
- CASA v. Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, 834 A.2d 63, 66 (Del. 2003)
- Rocker v. State, 240 A.2d 141, 144 (Del. 1968)

OPINION

Hill, Luciana v. Diego Gonzalez

PER CURIAM.

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE

LUCIANA HILL,¹ §

§ Petitioner Below, § No. 252, 2025 Appellant, § § Court Below—Family Court v. § of the State of Delaware §

DIEGO GONZALEZ, §

§ File No. CN23-04457 Respondent Below, § Petition No. 24-16280 Appellee. § Submitted: October 10, 2025 Decided: December 18, 2025 Before SEITZ, Chief Justice; VALIHURA and TRAYNOR, Justices.

ORDER

After consideration of the parties’ briefs and the record below, it appears to the Court that:

- (1) Luciana Hill (“Mother”) filed this appeal from the Family Court’s dismissal of her petition to modify custody and denial of her motion for reargument. For the reasons set forth below, this Court affirms the Family Court’s judgment.
- (2) Mother and Diego Gonzalez (“Father”) are the parents of a child born in May 2020 (“the Child”). On May 20, 2024, the Family Court issued a decision awarding the parents joint legal custody and shared residential placement of the 1 The Court previously assigned pseudonyms to the parties under Supreme Court Rule 7(d). Child. Mother, who had been represented by counsel, filed a pro se motion for reargument. The Family Court denied the motion.
- (3) On July 16, 2024 Mother, representing herself, filed an emergency petition for custody modification alleging that the Child had suffered several injuries and visited

the hospital on June 26, 2024. She sought an ex parte order granting her sole custody and primary residential placement. The Family Court denied the petition, finding that Mother failed to allege immediate irreparable harm.

(4) On October 4, 2024, Mother filed a second emergency petition for custody modification alleging that the Child had suffered several injuries, experienced psychological distress, and visited the hospital on June 26, 2024. She again sought an ex parte order granting her sole custody and primary residential placement of the Child. The Family Court denied the motion, ruling that the matter would proceed in the ordinary course.

(5) On December 13, 2024, the court held a case management teleconference and issued a scheduling order. The court informed Mother that because she filed her petition within two years of the May 20, 2024 custody order she would have to comply with 13 Del. C. § 729(c) for custody modification and establish that continuing enforcement of the May 20, 2024 order might endanger the Child's physical health or significantly impair the Child's emotional development. 2

(6) On December 18, 2024, Father filed an answer to Mother's petition.

Father alleged that he was not aware of any injuries the Child had suffered in his care and that the June 26, 2024 hospitalization was a result of the daycare not complying with its protocols. On January 8, 2025, Mother filed a motion for summary judgment because Father had not timely denied the allegations in her petition. The Family Court denied the motion based on Father's filing of an answer.

(7) On May 1, 2025, the Family Court held a hearing on Mother's petition.

Following the hearing, the Family Court entered an order dismissing the petition because there was no basis to grant the relief requested. The order stated that Mother declined to affirm the truthfulness of her testimony and asked the court to revoke its jurisdiction because she did not believe she or the Child were subject to the court's jurisdiction. Mother filed a motion for reargument based on her confusion about how to proceed at the hearing without infringing on her religious beliefs. The Family Court denied the motion.

(8) On appeal, Mother argues that the Family Court exhibited bias and discrimination against her religious beliefs in denying her motion for summary judgment and dismissing her petition for custody modification. This Court reviews the Family Court's factual and legal determinations as well as its inferences and 3 deductions.² We will not disturb the Family Court's rulings on appeal if the court's findings of fact are supported by the record and its explanations, deductions, and inferences are the product of an orderly and logical reasoning process. 3 We review legal rulings de novo. 4 If the Family Court correctly applied the law, then our standard of review is abuse of discretion. 5

(9) The Family Court did not exhibit bias or discrimination in denying

Mother's motion for summary judgment and dismissing her petition for custody modification. Under Rule 59(a) of the Family Court Rules of Civil Procedure, the Family Court will grant

summary judgment “if the movant shows that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.” At the time Mother moved for summary judgment, Father had filed an answer denying her allegations that he was harming the Child. Mother failed to show that there was no genuine issue of material fact concerning the Child’s well-being in the Father’s care and therefore was not entitled to summary judgment.

(10) As to the dismissal of Mother’s petition for custody modification, the Family Court found that there was no basis to grant the petition because *Mother 2 Wife (J.F.V.) v. Husband (O.W.V., Jr.)*, 402 A.2d 1202, 1204 (Del. 1979). 3 *Id.* 4 *Forrester v. Forrester*, 953 A.2d 175, 179 (Del. 2008) 5 *CASA v. Dep’t of Servs. for Children, Youth and Their Fams.*, 834 A.2d 63, 66 (Del. 2003). 4 asked the court to revoke its jurisdiction and would not affirm the truthfulness of her testimony at the hearing. The Delaware Rules of Evidence require a witness to “give an oath or affirmation to testify truthfully...in a form designed to impress that duty on the witness’s conscience” before testifying.⁶ Mother’s religious beliefs did not exempt her from this requirement because “[w]itnesses having conscientious scruples against taking an oath are permitted by 10 Del. C. § 5323 to declare and affirm.” 7 Given Mother’s refusal to affirm the truthfulness of her testimony, there was no basis for the Family Court to find that continuing enforcement of the May 20, 2024 order might endanger the Child’s physical health or significantly impair the Child’s emotional development as required for custody modification under Section 729(c). The Family Court did not err in denying Mother’s motion for summary judgment or dismissing her petition for custody modification. NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that the judgment of the Family Court is AFFIRMED. BY THE COURT: /s/ Collins J. Seitz, Jr. Chief Justice 6 D.R.E. 603. 7 *Rocker v. State*, 240 A.2d 141, 144 (Del. 1968). See also 10 Del. C. § 5323. 5