

SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE

Sanders v. Traver

109 S.W.3d 282 (Tenn. 2003) · Decided June 19, 2003

SUMMARY

The Tennessee Supreme Court held that Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 6.01 applies to actions under the Governmental Tort Liability Act because the rule defines, rather than extends, the Act's twelve-month statute of limitations. The wrongful-death complaint filed on Tuesday was timely because the one-year anniversary fell on a Sunday and the following Monday was a legal holiday; the court affirmed and remanded.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Tennessee
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Frank F. Drowota, III, C.J.; E. Riley Anderson, J.; Adolpho A. Birch, Jr., J.; Janice M. Holder, J.; William M. Barker, J.
JURISDICTION	Tennessee
DECIDED	June 19, 2003
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Blount Memorial Hospital appealed the Court of Appeals' reversal of the trial court's dismissal of a wrongful-death action as untimely under the Governmental Tort Liability Act. The Tennessee Supreme Court granted permission to appeal.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Issues of statutory construction and interpretation are reviewed de novo without a presumption of correctness.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	precedential
PARTIES	Blount Memorial Hospital, Incorporated v. Kaila B. Williams Sanders

TOPICS

- statute of limitations
- civil procedure
- statutory interpretation
- municipal liability
- wrongful death

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- statutory interpretation
- governmental tort liability
- wrongful death
- municipal law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 6.01 applies to actions brought under the Governmental Tort Liability Act.
2. Whether applying Rule 6.01 to a GTLA action impermissibly extends the GTLA's twelve-month statute of limitations.
3. Whether a complaint filed on the first court day after the one-year anniversary, when the anniversary falls on a Sunday followed by a legal holiday, is timely under the GTLA.

HOLDINGS

1. Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 6.01 applies to actions brought under the Governmental Tort Liability Act because GTLA suits filed in circuit court are ordinarily governed by the Tennessee Rules of Civil Procedure.
2. Rule 6.01 defines, rather than extends, the GTLA's twelve-month statute of limitations.
3. The wrongful-death complaint was timely filed on Tuesday, May 30, 2000, because the one-year anniversary fell on a Sunday and the following Monday was a legal holiday.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“For the reasons stated herein, this Court finds that a complaint is timely filed under the GTLA's twelve month statute of limitations if it is filed pursuant to the computation of time set forth in Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 6.01.” (286)

“There is, however, a fundamental difference between filing a second lawsuit and amending an original, timely-filed complaint.” (285)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Cathi D. Williams was admitted to Blount Memorial Hospital for surgery on May 26, 1999, and died there on May 28, 1999. The one-year anniversary of her death fell on Sunday, May 28, 2000, and the following day, Memorial Day, was a legal holiday when the courts were closed. Her daughter filed the wrongful-death action on Tuesday, May 30, 2000, against Blount Memorial Hospital, a governmental entity.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Sanders filed a wrongful-death action in the Blount County Circuit Court on Tuesday, May 30, 2000, against Blount Memorial Hospital and other defendants. The trial court granted the hospital's motion to dismiss, concluding that the GTLA superseded other statutory provisions and provided no special method for computing the limitations period. The Court of Appeals reversed, and the Tennessee Supreme Court affirmed that decision and remanded for further proceedings.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remanded to the trial court for further proceedings consistent with the opinion.

CASES CITED

- Doyle v. Frost, 49 S.W.3d 853, 858-859 (Tenn. 2001)
- Lucius v. City of Memphis, 925 S.W.2d 522, 525 (Tenn. 1996)
- Lynn v. City of Jackson, 63 S.W.3d 332, 337 (Tenn. 2001)
- State v. Walls, 62 S.W.3d 119, 121 (Tenn. 2001)
- Freeman v. Marco Transp. Co., 27 S.W.3d 909, 911 (Tenn. 2000)
- Cruse v. City of Columbia, 922 S.W.2d 492, 495 (Tenn. 1996)