

SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

State v. J.B.

2026-Ohio-1405 · No. 2024-0951 · Decided April 22, 2026

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Ohio held that R.C. 2953.32 does not prohibit a trial court from considering the number and nature of an applicant’s misdemeanor convictions when deciding whether to seal conviction records. The court also held that the State’s failure to object does not prevent the trial court from considering the government’s interest in maintaining those records. Concluding that the First District improperly substituted its judgment for that of the trial court, the court reversed in part and reinstated the trial court’s denial of J.B.’s applications in five cases.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Ohio
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Deters, J.; Kennedy, C.J.; Fischer, J.; DeWine, J.; Hawkins, J.; Shanahan, J.
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of Ohio
DECIDED	April 22, 2026
DOCKET	2024-0951
DISPOSITION	reversed_in_part
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The State appealed the First District Court of Appeals' judgment reversing the Hamilton County Municipal Court's denial of J.B.'s applications to seal the records of five misdemeanor convictions. The Supreme Court of Ohio accepted two propositions of law concerning the trial court's consideration of the number and nature of convictions, the governmental interest in maintaining public records, and the effect of the State's failure to object.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A trial court's decision to grant or deny an application to seal conviction records under R.C. 2953.32 is reviewed for abuse of discretion. An appellate court may not substitute its judgment for that of the trial court.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published
PARTIES	The State of Ohio v. J.B.

TOPICS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether R.C. 2953.32 permits a trial court to consider the number of an applicant's convictions when determining rehabilitation and weighing the applicant's interest in sealing records against the governmental interest in maintaining them.
2. Whether R.C. 2953.32 permits a trial court to consider the nature of an applicant's convictions and the governmental interest in maintaining public records even when the State does not object to the application.
3. Whether the First District improperly substituted its judgment for that of the trial court while applying abuse-of-discretion review.

HOLDINGS

1. R.C. 2953.32 does not prohibit a trial court from considering the number of an applicant's convictions when determining whether the applicant has demonstrated rehabilitation or when balancing the applicant's interests against the governmental interest in maintaining the records.
2. R.C. 2953.32 does not prohibit a trial court from considering the nature of an applicant's convictions when weighing the applicant's interest in sealing records against the governmental interest in keeping them public.
3. The State's failure to object to an application to seal does not relieve the trial court of its duty to consider and weigh the governmental interest in maintaining the records, and the statute does not place a burden on the State to submit evidence concerning the application.
4. The First District improperly substituted its judgment for that of the trial court. The trial court did not abuse its discretion in denying J.B.'s applications because its conclusions regarding rehabilitation and the competing governmental and applicant interests were not unreasonable, arbitrary, or unconscionable.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“But in any event, nothing in the statute proscribes consideration of the number of an applicant’s convictions when balancing the interests of the parties in sealing records.” (¶ 15)

“And the lack of objection on the part of the prosecutor does not relieve the trial court of its duty to weigh the governmental interest against the applicant’s interest.” (¶ 17)

“While nominally applying the abuse-of-discretion standard of review to the trial court’s judgment, the First District improperly substituted its judgment for that of the trial court.” (¶ 21)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

J.B. pleaded guilty between 2012 and 2016 to seven misdemeanor offenses, including attempted theft, unauthorized use of property, disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and obstructing official business. She later applied to seal the conviction records, citing her work as a licensed parenting counselor, pursuit of a doctorate in social work, and concerns about employment-related background checks. The trial court considered the number and nature of her convictions, her limited evidence of rehabilitation, and the governmental interest in allowing employers and clients to know about convictions involving dishonesty or offenses against justice and public administration.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

J.B. applied in the Hamilton County Municipal Court to seal records of seven misdemeanor convictions. The municipal court denied the applications, finding that J.B. had not demonstrated rehabilitation to the court's satisfaction and that the governmental interest in maintaining public records outweighed J.B.'s interest in sealing them. The First District reversed and ordered the records sealed. Cincinnati did not appeal as to two convictions; the State appealed the five cases prosecuted by the Hamilton County prosecutor. The Supreme Court reversed the First District in part and reinstated the trial court's judgments in those five cases.

DISPOSITION

reversed_in_part

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

None. The judgments of the Hamilton County Municipal Court in the five cases appealed by the Hamilton County prosecuting attorney were reinstated.

CASES CITED

- State v. Aguirre, 2014-Ohio-4603, ¶ 27
- State v. Hamilton, 1996-Ohio-440, ¶ 15
- State v. Beasley, 2018-Ohio-16, ¶ 12
- Berk v. Matthews, 53 Ohio St.3d 161, 169 (1990)
- State v. G.H., 2023-Ohio-3269, ¶ 22 (1st Dist.)
- Blakemore v. Blakemore, 5 Ohio St.3d 217, 219 (1983)
- State v. Adams, 62 Ohio St.2d 151, 157 (1980)
- State v. Darmond, 2013-Ohio-966, ¶ 34
- AAAA Ents., Inc. v. River Place Community Urban Redevelopment Corp., 50 Ohio St.3d 157, 161 (1990)
- State v. Nakoff, 1996-Ohio-159, ¶ 13
- State v. Jenkins, 15 Ohio St.3d 164, 222 (1984)
- Spalding v. Spalding, 355 Mich. 382, 384 (1959)
- State v. Sage, 31 Ohio St.3d 173 (1987)
- State v. Xie, 62 Ohio St.3d 521 (1992)

- State v. Hickman, 2024-Ohio-5747, ¶ 32
- State v. Johnson, 2021-Ohio-3304, ¶ 38
- State v. Boles, 2010-Ohio-278, ¶ 26 (2d Dist.)
- In re Sanders, 2024-Ohio-717, ¶ 8 (1st Dist.)

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