

SUPREME COURT OF RHODE ISLAND

Clifton Peasley v. City of Providence, by and through its Treasurer,
Shomari Husband

Supreme Court No. 2025-21-Appeal (PC 24-249) · No. 2025-21-Appeal (PC 24-249) · Decided January 22,
2026

SUMMARY

The Rhode Island Supreme Court affirmed dismissal of Clifton Peasley’s declaratory-judgment action seeking back pay for an unpaid suspension. The Court held that the election-of-remedies doctrine barred the action because Peasley had pursued the same dispute through the grievance and arbitration process under a collective bargaining agreement. The Court also rejected his arguments that the Teachers’ Tenure Act and Uniform Declaratory Judgments Act permitted simultaneous pursuit of judicial and arbitral remedies.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Rhode Island
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Maureen McKenna Goldberg, Associate Justice; Frank H. Suttell, Chief Justice; William P. Robinson III, Justice; Francis X. Flaherty, Justice; Melissa A. Long, Justice
JURISDICTION	Rhode Island Supreme Court
DECIDED	January 22, 2026
DOCKET	2025-21-Appeal (PC 24-249)
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Peasley appealed the Providence County Superior Court's dismissal under Rule 12(b)(6) of his action for declaratory relief seeking, among other relief, a declaration that he was entitled to back pay. The Rhode Island Supreme Court reviewed the dismissal and affirmed.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Supreme Court reviews a Rule 12(b)(6) dismissal de novo, looking no further than the complaint, assuming the truth of its allegations, and resolving doubts in the plaintiff's favor. Dismissal of a declaratory-judgment action before a merits hearing is proper when the pleadings demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that the requested declaration is impossible.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published and precedential

PARTIES

Clifton Peasley v. City of Providence, by and through its Treasurer,
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TOPICS

arbitration declaratory judgment motions to dismiss civil procedure appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure appellate procedure arbitration employment law municipal law remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the election-of-remedies doctrine barred Peasley from pursuing a declaratory-judgment action concerning back pay while his related grievance was pending in arbitration.
2. Whether the Teachers' Tenure Act or the Uniform Declaratory Judgments Act permitted Peasley to pursue the statutory declaratory remedy simultaneously with the contractual arbitration remedy.
3. Whether Peasley could avoid the election-of-remedies doctrine by analogizing the Teachers' Tenure Act to the antidiscrimination statutes discussed in *Weeks v. 735 Putnam Pike Operations, LLC*.

HOLDINGS

1. The election-of-remedies doctrine barred Peasley from pursuing the same back-pay dispute in the Superior Court after electing to pursue the grievance and arbitration process under the collective bargaining agreement.
2. The Teachers' Tenure Act did not create an absolute exception allowing Peasley to pursue both statutory declaratory relief and contractual arbitration for the same back-pay dispute.
3. The Uniform Declaratory Judgments Act did not permit Peasley to pursue a declaratory action simultaneously with arbitration of the same dispute.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“This Court long has adhered to the election of remedies doctrine to “mitigate unfairness to both parties by preventing double redress for a single wrong.”” (5)

“By initially electing to use the grievance process to challenge the sanction that the committee imposed against him, Martone ‘had selected the remedy to adjudicate his claim, and he should have pursued that remedy to its conclusion.’” (6)

“Having elected to proceed through arbitration, we concluded that the teachers’ association and its members “were foreclosed from seeking redress in the Superior Court” through the UDJA.” (9)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Peasley, a tenured Providence teacher, was placed on paid administrative leave after being charged with second-degree child abuse and later suspended without pay while the criminal charge remained pending. His union

pursued arbitration concerning the unpaid suspension and later filed a separate grievance seeking back pay after the criminal charge was dismissed and Peasley was reinstated. While the back-pay grievance was pending in arbitration, Peasley filed a Superior Court action seeking a declaration under the Teachers' Tenure Act that he had been vindicated and was entitled to back pay.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Peasley's union pursued a grievance and arbitration concerning his unpaid suspension, and a separate back-pay grievance was pending in arbitration when Peasley filed his declaratory-judgment action in Superior Court. The Superior Court granted the City's motion to dismiss, concluding that the election-of-remedies doctrine barred Peasley from pursuing the same dispute in court while pursuing arbitration. The Supreme Court accepted the appeal pursuant to an order to show cause and affirmed; during the appeal, the parties advised that the back-pay grievance had been arbitrated and they were awaiting a decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The papers in the case were remanded to the Providence County Superior Court. No substantive reconsideration was ordered; the judgment dismissing the declaratory-relief action remained affirmed.

CASES CITED

- *Montaquila v. Flagstar Bank, FSB*, 288 A.3d 967 (R.I. 2023)
- *Doe v. Brown University*, 253 A.3d 389 (R.I. 2021)
- *Mokwenyei v. Rhode Island Hospital*, 198 A.3d 17 (R.I. 2018)
- *Tucker Estates Charlestown, LLC v. Town of Charlestown*, 964 A.2d 1138 (R.I. 2009)
- *Martone v. Johnston School Committee*, 824 A.2d 426 (R.I. 2003)
- *State Department of Environmental Management v. State Labor Relations Board*, 799 A.2d 274 (R.I. 2002)
- *School Committee of North Kingstown v. Crouch*, 808 A.2d 1074 (R.I. 2002)
- *Weeks v. 735 Putnam Pike Operations, LLC*, 85 A.3d 1147 (R.I. 2014)
- *Bochner v. Providence School Committee*, 490 A.2d 37 (R.I. 1985)
- *Terzian v. Lombardi*, 180 A.3d 555 (R.I. 2018)
- *McGarry v. Pielech*, 108 A.3d 998 (R.I. 2015)
- *Cranston Teachers' Association v. Cranston School Committee*, 423 A.2d 69 (R.I. 1980)
- *City of Pawtucket v. Pawtucket Lodge No. 4, Fraternal Order of Police*, 545 A.2d 499 (R.I. 1988)