

SUPREME COURT OF CONNECTICUT

State of Connecticut v. James Brown

State v. Brown · No. SC 20964 · Decided May 19, 2026

SUMMARY

The Connecticut Supreme Court affirmed James Brown’s murder conviction. The court held that the trial court did not abuse its discretion by excusing one juror, denying a mistrial, and retaining other jurors after investigating reported safety concerns. The court also rejected claims that the prosecutor committed misconduct while questioning two witnesses.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Connecticut
WRITING FOR THE COURT	McDonald, J.; Mullins, C. J.; D’Auria, J.; Ecker, J.; Alexander, J.; Dannehy, J.; Bright, J.
JURISDICTION	Connecticut Supreme Court
DECIDED	May 19, 2026
DOCKET	SC 20964
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Direct appeal from a judgment of conviction of murder following a jury trial.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The denial of a motion for mistrial and decisions concerning juror impartiality are reviewed for abuse of discretion. The court also applies a two-step due process analysis to prosecutorial-impropriety claims: first determining whether impropriety occurred and then whether the impropriety or cumulative effect of multiple improprieties deprived the defendant of a fair trial.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	James Brown v. State of Connecticut

TOPICS

- criminal procedure jury selection prosecutorial misconduct appellate procedure due process

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the defendant was entitled to a presumption of prejudice under *Remmer v. United States* based on alleged external contact involving a juror.
2. Whether the trial court abused its discretion by denying a mistrial and declining to excuse Jurors 1, 3, and 6 after canvassing the jury concerning possible bias and safety concerns.
3. Whether the prosecutor committed prosecutorial impropriety by asking a witness about a hearsay sentence in a prior sworn statement while laying a foundation for admission of that statement.
4. Whether the prosecutor committed prosecutorial impropriety by questioning an eyewitness about his arrest, alleged status as a snitch, and efforts to have associates attend the courtroom.

HOLDINGS

1. The defendant was not entitled to the *Remmer* presumption because he did not show that the alleged external contact related directly to the merits of the matter being tried rather than merely to the trial more generally.
2. The trial court did not abuse its discretion by denying the mistrial motion or by declining to excuse Jurors 1, 3, and 6 after conducting an adequate and individualized jury canvass.
3. The prosecutor did not commit prosecutorial impropriety by asking Harris a single question about a hearsay sentence in his prior sworn statement while attempting to refresh Harris' recollection and lay a foundation for treating him as a hostile witness and admitting the statement under *Whelan*.
4. The prosecutor did not commit prosecutorial impropriety by questioning Rosado about his capias arrest, his statement that associates should pack the courtroom, his alleged status as a snitch, and related matters because the questions were reasonably connected to impeachment of his changed account and lack of recollection.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"The Remmer presumption applies "to external interference with the jury's deliberative process via private communication, contact, or tampering with jurors that relates directly to the matter being tried.""

"The trial court's assessment of the juror's assurances, while entitled to deference, must be realistic and informed by inquiries adequate in the context of the case to ascertain the nature and import of any potential juror bias."

"The nature and quality of the juror's assurances [are] of paramount importance; the juror must be unequivocal about his or her ability to be fair and impartial."

"A prosecutor has the responsibility of a minister of justice and not simply that of an advocate."

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The defendant was convicted of fatally shooting Kenneth Sullivan in Hartford after a fight between members of rival groups outside a concert. During trial, Juror 7 reportedly expressed safety concerns about interactions with trial attendees near the juror parking lot, although she later denied having or expressing those concerns when questioned in court. The trial court excused Juror 7, canvassed the remaining jurors, found them able to remain fair and impartial, and denied the defendant's motion for a mistrial. The prosecutor also questioned witnesses about a prior sworn statement containing hearsay and about circumstances surrounding another witness's arrest and reluctance to testify.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The defendant was charged by substitute information with murder in the Superior Court for the judicial district of Hartford. After a jury trial before Droney, J., the jury returned a guilty verdict and the court imposed a total effective sentence of forty years' imprisonment. The defendant appealed directly to the Supreme Court of Connecticut, challenging the denial of a mistrial and the excusal of only one juror, as well as alleged prosecutorial improprieties during witness examination.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Remmer v. United States, 347 U.S. 227, 74 S. Ct. 450, 98 L. Ed. 654 (1954)
- State v. Berrios, 320 Conn. 265, 129 A.3d 696 (2016)
- State v. Hughes, 341 Conn. 387, 267 A.3d 81 (2021)
- Myers v. Commissioner of Correction, 215 Conn. App. 592, 284 A.3d 309 (2022), cert. denied, 346 Conn. 1021, 293 A.3d 897 (2023)
- State v. Whelan, 200 Conn. 743, 513 A.2d 86 (1986), cert. denied, 479 U.S. 994, 107 S. Ct. 597, 93 L. Ed. 2d 598 (1986)
- State v. Sullivan, 351 Conn. 798, 334 A.3d 446 (2025)
- State v. Williams, 204 Conn. 523, 529 A.2d 653 (1987)
- State v. Warholic, 278 Conn. 354, 897 A.2d 569 (2006)
- State v. Taft, 306 Conn. 749, 51 A.3d 988 (2012)
- State v. McLaren, 127 Conn. App. 70, 15 A.3d 183 (2011)
- State v. Garcia, 7 Conn. App. 367, 509 A.2d 31 (1986)