

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT

In re Mays, Minors

In re Mays · No. SC: 142568 · Decided January 27, 2012

SUMMARY

The Michigan Supreme Court affirmed the finding that clear and convincing evidence supported at least one statutory ground for terminating the respondent mother's parental rights, but reversed the determination that termination was in the children's best interests. The Court held that the factual record was inadequate because the trial court did not consider the children's placement with their maternal grandmother and remanded for further proceedings. Justice Markman dissented, concluding that the termination proceedings and best-interests determination were adequate.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Michigan Supreme Court
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Robert P. Young, Jr., Chief Justice; Michael F. Cavanagh; Marilyn Kelly; Stephen J. Markman; Diane M. Hathaway; Mary Beth Kelly; Brian K. Zahra
JURISDICTION	Michigan
DECIDED	January 27, 2012
DOCKET	SC: 142568
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The Michigan Supreme Court granted leave to appeal from a Michigan Court of Appeals judgment affirming a Wayne Circuit Court order terminating respondent mother's parental rights.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Clear-error review of the trial court's findings concerning statutory grounds for termination and the children's best interests.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Michigan Supreme Court opinion
PARTIES	Respondent mother

TOPICS

- termination of parental rights
- parental rights
- family law procedure
- appellate procedure
- standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court clearly erred in finding that clear and convincing evidence supported at least one statutory ground for termination under MCL 712A.19b(3).
2. Whether the trial court clearly erred in finding that termination of respondent mother's parental rights was in the children's best interests under MCL 712A.19b(5).
3. Whether the Supreme Court should reach respondent's claim concerning the sufficiency of the permanency-planning hearing under MCL 712A.19a.

HOLDINGS

1. The trial court did not clearly err in finding that clear and convincing evidence supported termination under at least one of the alleged statutory grounds.
2. The trial court clearly erred in finding that termination was in the children's best interests because the factual record was inadequate to support that determination, particularly because it did not show consideration of the children's placement with their maternal grandmother.
3. The Court declined to reach respondent's claim concerning the sufficiency of the permanency-planning hearing because that issue was not among the claims raised in respondent's Court of Appeals appeal.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The factual record in this case is inadequate to make a best interests determination.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The Wayne Circuit Court terminated respondent mother's parental rights after finding that clear and convincing evidence supported at least one statutory ground for termination and that termination was in the children's best interests. The children were placed with their maternal grandmother. The Michigan Supreme Court concluded that the factual record did not show that the trial court considered whether termination was appropriate in light of that relative placement.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Wayne Circuit Court, Family Division, terminated respondent mother's parental rights on March 30, 2010. The Michigan Court of Appeals affirmed on November 23, 2010, concluding that clear and convincing evidence supported at least one statutory ground for termination and that termination was in the children's best interests. The Michigan Supreme Court affirmed the statutory-grounds ruling, reversed the best-interests ruling, and remanded for further proceedings.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remanded to the Wayne Circuit Court, Family Division, for further proceedings not inconsistent with the order. The Supreme Court did not retain jurisdiction.

CASES CITED

- In re Mason, 486 Mich 142, 164 (2010)
- In re Trejo Minors, 462 Mich 341, 353 (2000)
- In re Trejo Minors, 462 Mich 341, 356 (2000)
- 489 Mich 857 (2011)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

Order Michigan Supreme Court Lansing, Michigan January 27, 2012 Robert P. Young, Jr., Chief Justice 10/October 2011 Michael F. Cavanagh Marilyn Kelly Stephen J. Markman 142568 Diane M. Hathaway Mary Beth Kelly Brian K. Zahra, SC: 142568 Justices In re MAYS, Minors. COA: 297446 Wayne CC Family Division: 09-485821

_____/ On order of the Court, leave to appeal having been granted, and the briefs and oral arguments of the parties having been considered by the Court, we AFFIRM in part and REVERSE in part the November 23, 2010 judgment of the Court of Appeals and the March 30, 2010 order of the Wayne Circuit Court terminating respondent mother's parental rights, and REMAND this case to the Wayne Circuit Court, Family Division, for further proceedings not inconsistent with this order.

We AFFIRM that part of the Court of Appeals judgment holding that the trial court did not clearly err in finding that clear and convincing evidence was presented to support termination under at least one of the statutory grounds alleged. MCL 712A.19b(3).

We REVERSE that part of the Court of Appeals judgment holding that the trial court did not clearly err in finding that termination was in the children's best interests. MCL 712A.19b(5). The factual record in this case is inadequate to make a best interests determination.

In particular, there is no evidence in the record that the trial court considered whether termination of the respondent's parental rights was appropriate given the children's placement with their maternal grandmother.

In re Mason, 486 Mich 142, 164 (2010). Because respondent's appeal in the Court of Appeals only questioned the trial court's findings that the statutory grounds for termination existed and that termination was in the best interests of the children, we do not reach respondent's claim of error regarding the sufficiency of the permanency planning hearing, MCL 712A.19a.

We do not retain jurisdiction. 2 HATHAWAY, J., concurs in the result only. MARKMAN, J. (dissenting). I respectfully dissent from the orders reversing both the Court of Appeals' and the trial court's decisions to terminate respondents' parental rights and I would vacate this Court's March 23, 2011 orders, 489 Mich 857 (2011), and deny leave to appeal. I am persuaded that the proceedings here were fair and in accordance with the law, and that the trial court exercised reasonable judgment in concluding that grounds existed for termination, and that termination was in the "best interests" of the children.

Considerable efforts were undertaken to reunify respondents with their children, although these efforts clearly failed. Respondent Mays failed to successfully complete and benefit from counseling and parenting classes, and further failed to maintain legal employment. Respondent Phillips failed to successfully complete and benefit from counseling and further failed to maintain adequate shelter or legal employment.

Additionally, Phillips testified that he has never expressed any desire for the children to come live with him and that the children were better off living with their grandmother. Two review hearings were then held, with Mays choosing not to attend either hearing and Phillips attending only one.

Under these circumstances, I cannot say that the trial court "clearly erred" by finding that respondents have "fail[ed] to provide proper care or custody for the child[ren] and there is no reasonable expectation that [they] will be able to provide proper care and custody within a reasonable time...." MCL 712A.19b(3)(g). I also do not believe that the trial court "clearly erred" by concluding that termination of respondents' parental rights was in the children's "best interests" because "neither parent is prepared to have the children placed in their care and neither is engaged in preparing themselves to parent the children on a full time basis." The majority does not dispute this conclusion, but asserts that the record is "inadequate to make a best interests determination." Again, I respectfully disagree.

There is no specific formula, and there are no delimited factors that a court must consider when making a "best interest" determination. Rather, the trial court "may consider evidence introduced by any party," *In re Trejo Minors*, 462 Mich 341, 353 (2000), and if no "best interest" evidence is offered, the court may enter a finding "from evidence on the whole record...." The record here, which included hearings, reports, and testimony, was more than sufficient, in my opinion, to allow the court to make a thoughtful and reasoned "best interest" determination.

In particular, the majority faults the court for not considering the children's placement with a relative. However, the proposition that a court must always consider placement with a relative before termination, even after grounds for termination have been established and "best interest" findings made, lacks grounding in the law, which contains no specific factors that a court must invariably consider in deciding a termination case.

Rather, what is required is a case-by-case determination in accordance 3 with the law, and that has occurred. While placement with a relative may in many instances constitute a relevant consideration in the “best interest” determination, the failure to consider it in a particular case does not necessarily preclude the court from determining that termination is in the children’s “best interests.” The primary beneficiary of the “best interest” determination is the child, Trejo, at 356, and when the child’s best interests are clearly served by the termination of rights, the fact that they are then living with a relative does not in every instance undermine that determination.

I, Corbin R. Davis, Clerk of the Michigan Supreme Court, certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of the order entered at the direction of the Court. January 27, 2012

_____ t0125 Clerk