

SUPREME COURT OF OREGON

State v. Monaco

375 Or. 1 (2026) · No. S071665 · Decided March 12, 2026

SUMMARY

The Oregon Supreme Court affirmed convictions for two counts of felony murder. The court held that the defendant’s statements during a police interrogation were voluntary under the totality of the circumstances and admissible, and that Oregon’s felony-murder statute, ORS 163.115(1)(b), as interpreted in *State v. Blair*, did not violate the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Oregon
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Bushong, J.; DeHoog, J.
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of Oregon
DECIDED	March 12, 2026
DOCKET	S071665
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	On review from the Oregon Court of Appeals after affirmance of defendant's convictions in Multnomah County Circuit Court. The Supreme Court reviewed the denial of a motion to suppress interrogation statements and the denial of a demurrer challenging the constitutionality of Oregon's felony-murder statute.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the denial of the motion to suppress and the denial of the demurrer for errors of law. Voluntariness of a confession is a question of law; the court is bound by supported trial-court factual findings and presumes facts were decided consistently with the ultimate conclusion when express findings are absent. The state bears the burden of proving voluntariness by a preponderance of the evidence.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published, precedential Oregon Supreme Court opinion; en banc decision.
PARTIES	Ryan Thomas Monaco v. State of Oregon

TOPICS

suppression of evidence

criminal procedure

due process

fourteenth amendment

statutory interpretation

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

criminal procedure

constitutional law

evidence

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court erred in denying suppression of Monaco's interrogation statements on the ground that they were involuntary under ORS 136.425, Article I, section 12, of the Oregon Constitution, and the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.
2. Whether ORS 163.115(1)(b), as interpreted in *State v. Blair*, violates the Due Process Clause by conclusively presuming a culpable mental state concerning causation of death or by creating an unconstitutional strict-liability felony-murder offense.

HOLDINGS

1. The trial court did not err in finding that Monaco's statements were voluntary and that his free will was not overborne by improper threats or inducements. The statements therefore were admissible under Oregon law and the Oregon and United States Constitutions.
2. ORS 163.115(1)(b), as interpreted in *State v. Blair*, does not violate due process by conclusively presuming a material element or shifting the burden of proof. The statute substitutes proof of the culpable mental state required for the predicate felony for a separate culpable mental state concerning causation of death.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The question a trial court must decide “is not whether a particular interrogation method was used, but whether, considering the totality of the circumstances, the suspect’s will was overborne.”” (at 12)

“The culpable mental state required for felony murder under ORS 163.115(1)(b) is not conclusively presumed.” (at 24-25)

“Treating ORS 163.115(1)(b) as imposing strict liability in part does not establish a due process violation.” (at 29-30)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Ryan Monaco had a volatile relationship with TM, his estranged girlfriend, who lived with two roommates. After an argument, Monaco returned to TM's apartment, threatened to soak her couch in gasoline and burn it, and later started a fire that killed the two roommates. Three days later, police arrested Monaco, advised him of his Miranda rights, and interrogated him for approximately four hours; during the interrogation he made statements admitting that he had poured gasoline on the couch but denying that he intentionally started the fire or intended to kill anyone.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Defendant was charged with numerous offenses arising from a fatal apartment fire, including felony murder. The circuit court denied his motion to suppress statements made during a police interrogation and denied his demurrer asserting that ORS 163.115(1)(b) violated due process. After convictions, the Court of Appeals affirmed, and the Oregon Supreme Court allowed review and affirmed both the Court of Appeals decision and the circuit court judgment.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Jackson, 364 Or. 1, 430 P.3d 1067 (2018)
- State v. Ehly, 317 Or. 66, 854 P.2d 421 (1993)
- State v. Blair, 348 Or. 72, 228 P.3d 564 (2010)
- State v. Powell, 352 Or. 210, 282 P.3d 845 (2012)
- State v. Roble-Baker, 340 Or. 631, 136 P.3d 22 (2006)
- State v. Babson, 355 Or. 383, 326 P.3d 559 (2014)
- State v. Fanus, 336 Or. 63, 79 P.3d 847 (2003)
- Lego v. Twomey, 404 U.S. 477 (1972)
- Haynes v. Washington, 373 U.S. 503 (1963)
- Sandstrom v. Montana, 442 U.S. 510 (1979)
- State v. Rainey, 298 Or. 459, 693 P.2d 635 (1985)
- Rehaif v. United States, 588 U.S. 225, 139 S. Ct. 2191 (2019)
- United States v. United States Gypsum Co., 438 U.S. 422 (1978)
- Morrisette v. United States, 342 U.S. 246 (1952)
- Patterson v. New York, 432 U.S. 197 (1977)
- State v. Buttrey, 293 Or. 575, 651 P.2d 1055 (1982)
- State v. Patterson, 311 Kan. 59, 455 P.3d 792 (2020)
- State v. Burkhart, 325 Mont. 27, 103 P.3d 1037 (2004)
- State v. Wanrow, 91 Wash. 2d 301, 588 P.2d 1320 (1978)
- Mares v. State, 939 P.2d 724 (Wyo. 1997)
- State v. Herrera, 176 Ariz. 21, 859 P.2d 131 (1993)
- Commonwealth v. Rawls, 328 Pa. Super. 469, 477 A.2d 540 (1984)
- People v. Dillon, 34 Cal. 3d 441, 668 P.2d 697 (1983)
- Brown v. State, 448 N.E.2d 10 (Ind. 1983)
- State v. Oliver, 341 N.W.2d 744 (Iowa 1983)
- Commonwealth v. Moran, 387 Mass. 644, 442 N.E.2d 399 (1982)
- State ex rel. Peacher v. Sencindiver, 160 W. Va. 314, 233 S.E.2d 425 (1977)

- State v. Swift, 290 N.C. 383, 226 S.E.2d 652 (1976)
- Gore v. Leeke, 261 S.C. 308, 199 S.E.2d 755 (1973)
- People of Territory of Guam v. Root, 524 F.2d 195 (9th Cir. 1975)
- State v. Ortega, 112 N.M. 554, 817 P.2d 1196 (1991)
- State v. Cook, 340 Or. 530, 135 P.3d 260 (2006)
- State v. Davis, 336 Or. 19, 77 P.3d 1111 (2003)
- State of Oregon v. Brown, 7 Or. 186 (1879)
- State v. Branch, 244 Or. 97, 415 P.2d 766 (1966)
- State v. Dorland, 161 Or. 403, 89 P.2d 595 (1939)
- State v. Link, 346 Or. 187, 208 P.3d 936 (2009)
- State v. Zweigart, 344 Or. 619, 188 P.3d 242 (2008)
- State v. Quinn, 290 Or. 383, 623 P.2d 630 (1981)