

SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS OF WEST VIRGINIA

Jason M. Compton v. Shawn Straughn, Superintendent

Compton v. Straughn · No. 19-0733 · Decided June 25, 2020

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia affirmed the denial of Jason M. Compton’s petition for a writ of habeas corpus. The court held that his conclusory allegations of ineffective assistance concerning voluntary intoxication and diminished capacity did not warrant an evidentiary hearing or appointment of counsel, and that his derivative jurisdictional claim likewise failed.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Chief Justice Tim Armstead; Justice Margaret L. Workman; Justice Elizabeth D. Walker; Justice Evan H. Jenkins; Justice John A. Hutchison
JURISDICTION	West Virginia
DECIDED	June 25, 2020
DOCKET	19-0733
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner appealed the Circuit Court of Kanawha County's denial of his petition for a writ of habeas corpus and motions for appointment of counsel.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The final order and ultimate disposition in a habeas corpus action are reviewed for abuse of discretion, underlying factual findings for clear error, and questions of law de novo.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Memorandum decision under West Virginia Rule of Appellate Procedure 21; the opinion does not state a separate precedential designation.
PARTIES	Jason M. Compton v. Shawn Straughn, Superintendent, Northern Regional Jail and Correctional Center

TOPICS

- habeas corpus
- state post-conviction relief
- ineffective assistance
- appellate procedure
- standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

state post-conviction habeas corpus

criminal procedure

ineffective assistance of counsel

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the circuit court abused its discretion by denying the habeas petition without an evidentiary hearing.
2. Whether the circuit court should have appointed counsel and conducted an omnibus habeas proceeding based on Compton's allegations that trial counsel failed to investigate or advise him about voluntary intoxication and diminished-capacity defenses.
3. Whether the alleged ineffective assistance deprived the circuit court of jurisdiction over the criminal case.

HOLDINGS

1. A court with jurisdiction over habeas proceedings may deny a habeas petition without a hearing and without appointing counsel when the petition, exhibits, affidavits, or other documentary evidence show that the petitioner is entitled to no relief.
2. The circuit court did not abuse its discretion in denying the habeas petition without appointing counsel or conducting an omnibus proceeding because Compton's allegations were conclusory and the record did not support the claimed intoxication or diminished-capacity defenses.
3. The jurisdictional claim failed because it was derivative of the ineffective-assistance claim, which the circuit court properly rejected.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A mere recitation of any of [the] . . . grounds [for habeas relief] without detailed factual support does not justify the issuance of a writ, the appointment of counsel, and the holding of a hearing.” (at 2)

“For the foregoing reasons, we affirm the circuit court’s July 18, 2019, order denying petitioner’s petition for a writ of habeas corpus.” (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

In 2015, Compton was indicted on two robbery counts and two conspiracy-to-commit-robbery counts and faced possible recidivist charges based on prior convictions. He pleaded guilty to one robbery count without reference to a firearm in exchange for dismissal of the other charges and the State's agreement not to file a recidivist information. Before sentencing, he acknowledged robbing a bank to obtain money for drugs, stated that he had been high, and described details of the robbery, but did not claim that intoxication deprived him of capacity. The circuit court imposed a thirty-year sentence.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Compton pleaded guilty in the Circuit Court of Kanawha County to one count of robbery under a plea agreement that dismissed the remaining charges and precluded the State from filing a recidivist information. He later filed a

habeas petition alleging ineffective assistance based on counsel's failure to investigate or advise him regarding voluntary intoxication and diminished-capacity defenses, and asserting a derivative jurisdictional claim. The circuit court denied appointment of counsel and denied the habeas petition without a hearing. The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Honaker, 193 W. Va. 51, 454 S.E.2d 96
- Mathena v. Haines, 219 W. Va. 417, 633 S.E.2d 771
- Anstey v. Ballard, 237 W. Va. 411, 787 S.E.2d 864
- Losh v. McKenzie, 166 W. Va. 762, 277 S.E.2d 606
- Perdue v. Coiner, 156 W. Va. 467, 194 S.E.2d 657
- White v. Haines, 215 W. Va. 698, 601 S.E.2d 18