

COURT OF APPEALS, SIXTH APPELLATE DISTRICT OF TEXAS AT
TEXARKANA

Johnny Edwards IV v. The State of Texas

No. 06-25-00168-CR · No. 06-25-00168-CR · Decided June 8, 2026

SUMMARY

The Sixth Court of Appeals of Texas at Texarkana affirmed Johnny Edwards IV’s conviction for murder and life sentence. The court held that the trial court did not abuse its discretion by admitting autopsy photographs and did not err by including the full statutory mens rea definitions in the jury charge. The court also held that any error in admitting punishment-phase testimony concerning a prior offense was cured because the same or similar evidence was admitted without objection.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Court of Appeals, Sixth Appellate District of Texas at Texarkana
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Justice Charles van Cleef; Chief Justice Stevens; Justice van Cleef; Justice Rambin
JURISDICTION	Court of Appeals, Sixth Appellate District of Texas at Texarkana
DECIDED	June 8, 2026
DOCKET	06-25-00168-CR
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Edwards appealed his conviction and life sentence from the Criminal District Court No. 3 of Tarrant County, Texas, challenging the admission of autopsy photographs, the jury charge's mens rea definitions, and the admission of punishment-phase testimony.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Admission of photographs is reviewed for abuse of discretion and will be reversed only if the ruling falls outside the zone of reasonable disagreement. Jury-charge claims are reviewed in two steps: the court first determines whether error occurred and then evaluates whether sufficient harm resulted to require reversal. An evidentiary ruling is subject to harmless-error principles, including the rule that error is cured when the same evidence is admitted elsewhere without objection.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

TOPICS

evidence

jury instructions

mens rea

preservation of error

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Texas criminal law

criminal procedure

evidence

jury instructions

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court abused its discretion under Texas Rule of Evidence 403 by admitting autopsy photographs over Edwards's unfair-prejudice objection.
2. Whether the jury charge was erroneous or egregiously harmful because it included the statutory mens rea definitions concerning the nature of conduct and surrounding circumstances rather than limiting mens rea exclusively to the result of conduct.
3. Whether the trial court reversibly erred by overruling Edwards's hearsay and Confrontation Clause objections to punishment-phase testimony when the same or similar evidence was admitted elsewhere without objection.

HOLDINGS

1. The trial court did not abuse its discretion by admitting the challenged autopsy photographs because their probative value was not substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice.
2. The jury charge was not erroneous because, in a capital-murder case involving underlying burglary or robbery conduct, the abstract mens rea definitions may include the nature-of-conduct and nature-of-circumstances elements in addition to the result-of-conduct element.
3. Any error in admitting the challenged punishment-phase testimony was cured because the same or similar evidence was admitted elsewhere without objection.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Autopsy photographs are generally admissible unless they depict mutilation of the victim caused by the autopsy itself.” (3)

“For this reason, “in a capital murder case involving more than one conduct element,” it is not error “for the definitions to include more than the result of conduct element.”” (6)

“An error in the admission of evidence is cured where the same evidence comes in elsewhere without objection.” (9)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Edwards admitted in an audio-recorded confession that he went to the victim's apartment to purchase marijuana and shot the victim after the victim allegedly threatened Edwards's family. The victim died from the gunshot

wounds, and the State introduced color autopsy photographs depicting the gunshot entry and exit wounds. During punishment, the State introduced evidence of Edwards's prior Ohio robbery and felonious-assault offenses, including testimony about a taxi-driver assault and Edwards's admission that he attacked the driver because he needed money.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A Tarrant County jury convicted Edwards of the lesser-included offense of murder after viewing his audio-recorded confession and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Edwards appealed. The case was transferred from the Second Court of Appeals to the Sixth Court of Appeals under the Texas Supreme Court's docket-equalization authority, and the court affirmed the trial court's judgment.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Sanchez v. State, 418 S.W.3d 302, 310-11 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2013, pet. ref'd)
- James v. State, 623 S.W.3d 533, 546-47 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2021, no pet.)
- Paredes v. State, 129 S.W.3d 530, 539 (Tex. Crim. App. 2004)
- Rayford v. State, 125 S.W.3d 521, 529 (Tex. Crim. App. 2003)
- Frank v. State, 183 S.W.3d 63, 78 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, pet. ref'd)
- Salazar v. State, 38 S.W.3d 141, 150-53 (Tex. Crim. App. 2001)
- Najar v. State, 618 S.W.3d 366 (Tex. Crim. App. 2021)
- Reese v. State, 33 S.W.3d 238, 241 (Tex. Crim. App. 2000)
- Clark v. State, 365 S.W.3d 333, 339 (Tex. Crim. App. 2012)
- Murrieta v. State, 578 S.W.3d 552, 554 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 2019, no pet.)
- Abdnor v. State, 871 S.W.2d 726, 731 (Tex. Crim. App. 1994)
- Wilson v. State, 391 S.W.3d 131, 138 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 2012, no pet.)
- Cook v. State, 884 S.W.2d 485, 490 (Tex. Crim. App. 1994)
- Alvarado v. State, 704 S.W.2d 36, 39 (Tex. Crim. App. 1985)
- Hughes v. State, 897 S.W.2d 285, 295-96 (Tex. Crim. App. 1994)
- Patrick v. State, 906 S.W.2d 481, 491 (Tex. Crim. App. 1995)
- Gonzalez v. State, No. 06-25-00055-CR, 2025 WL 3199446, at *4-5 (Tex. App.—Texarkana Nov. 17, 2025, pet. ref'd) (mem. op.)
- Torres v. State, 691 S.W.3d 138, 149 (Tex. App.—Austin 2024, pet. ref'd)
- Barnes v. State, 56 S.W.3d 221, 234 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2001)
- Hurd v. State, 322 S.W.3d 787, 793 n.5 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2010, no pet.)
- Valle v. State, 109 S.W.3d 500, 509 (Tex. Crim. App. 2003)

- Adams v. State, No. 02-05-00379-CR, 2007 WL 495190, at *17 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth Feb. 15, 2007, pet. ref'd) (mem. op.)

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