

SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

Frederic Guttenberg, etc., et al. v. The School Board of Broward County

Guttenberg · No. SC19-487 · Decided September 24, 2020

SUMMARY

The Florida Supreme Court affirmed a circuit court judgment applying the sovereign-immunity damage caps in section 768.28(5), Florida Statutes, to claims arising from the Parkland mass shooting. Relying on *Barnett v. State Department of Financial Services*, the court held that the shooting constituted a single incident or occurrence subject to the aggregate statutory cap.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Florida
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per Curiam; Chief Justice Canady; Justice Polston; Justice Labarga; Justice Lawson; Justice Muñoz; Justice Curiel; Justice Grosshans
JURISDICTION	Florida
DECIDED	September 24, 2020
DOCKET	SC19-487
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Certified appeal from a final declaratory judgment and order granting the School Board's motion for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The opinion does not expressly state a standard of review.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Florida Supreme Court opinion; binding precedent.
PARTIES	Frederic Guttenberg, as Personal Representative of the Estate of Jaime T. Guttenberg, Andrew Pollack, as Co-Personal Representative of the Estate of Meadow Pollack, Shara Kaplan, as Co-Personal Representative of the Estate of Meadow Pollack, Max Schachter, as Personal Representative of the Estate of Alex Schachter and Benjamin E. Wikander, Philip and April Schentrup, as Co-Representatives for the Estate of Carmen Schentrup, Martin Duque and Daisy Anguiano, as parents of Martin Duque, Manuel Oliver and Patricia Padauy, as Co-Personal Representatives of the Estate of Joaquin Oliver, Stacy Lippel and Linda Beigel, as Personal Representatives of the Estate of Scott

Beigel, Ashley Maria Baez, Isabel Chequer, Anthony and Jennifer Montalto, Kong Feng Wang, and Hui Ying Zhang v. The School Board of Broward County

TOPICS

summary judgment declaratory judgment statutory interpretation appellate jurisdiction civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure sovereign immunity statutory interpretation appellate procedure declaratory judgment

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the mass shooting constituted a single incident or occurrence for purposes of the aggregate sovereign-immunity damage cap in section 768.28(5), Florida Statutes.
2. Whether the circuit court properly granted summary judgment and entered a final declaratory judgment applying the statutory damage cap.

HOLDINGS

1. For purposes of the sovereign-immunity damage caps in section 768.28(5), Florida Statutes, the mass shooting constituted a single incident or occurrence, and cumulative liability for all resulting injury claims could not exceed the aggregate statutory cap.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“the mass shooting committed by [the shooter] is a single ‘incident or occurrence’ . . . and the cumulative liability for all claims of injury resulting from the incident may not exceed the aggregate cap . . . set forth in the statute.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The case arose from claims related to the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the resulting claims against the School Board. The dispute concerned whether the claims were subject to the aggregate sovereign-immunity damage cap in section 768.28(5), Florida Statutes. The circuit court applied the statutory cap and entered declaratory relief in favor of the School Board.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Circuit Court for the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit in and for Broward County granted the School Board's motion for summary judgment and rendered a final declaratory judgment concerning the applicable sovereign-immunity damage caps. The Fourth District Court of Appeal certified the appeal to the Supreme Court of Florida as presenting issues of great public importance or having a great effect on the proper administration of justice throughout the state.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Barnett v. State Department of Financial Services, No. SC19-87 (Fla. Sept. 24, 2020)
- Guttenberg v. Sch. Bd. of Broward Cty., No. 4D19-0229 (Fla. 4th DCA Mar. 28, 2019)
- Menescal v. School Board of Broward County, No. CACE-18-009397 (Fla. 17th Cir. Ct. Dec. 20, 2018)

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