

COURT OF APPEALS OF OHIO, FIFTH APPELLATE DISTRICT, STARK
COUNTY

State v. Stevens

2025-Ohio-5706 · No. 2024CA00186 · Decided December 22, 2025

SUMMARY

The Fifth District Court of Appeals of Ohio affirmed Winfield Stevens's convictions for rape and gross sexual imposition. The court rejected challenges based on insufficient evidence, manifest weight, prosecutorial misconduct, improper expert testimony concerning the victim's statements, and ineffective assistance of counsel.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Court of Appeals of Ohio, Fifth Appellate District, Stark County
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Craig R. Baldwin; Andrew J. King; David M. Gormley
JURISDICTION	Court of Appeals of Ohio, Fifth Appellate District, Stark County
DECIDED	December 22, 2025
DOCKET	2024CA00186
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Winfield Stevens appealed his jury convictions and sentence for rape and gross sexual imposition from the Stark County Court of Common Pleas.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Sufficiency of the evidence is reviewed by asking whether, viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, any rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Manifest-weight review considers whether the jury clearly lost its way and created a manifest miscarriage of justice, with the appellate court acting as a thirteenth juror only in exceptional cases. Prosecutorial-misconduct claims are reviewed for improper conduct and resulting prejudice to substantial rights in the context of the entire trial. Unobjected-to evidentiary claims are reviewed for plain error under Crim.R. 52(B). Ineffective-assistance claims are reviewed under the two-prong Strickland/Bradley framework.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published

TOPICS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether sufficient evidence supported Stevens's rape conviction under R.C. 2907.02(A)(1)(b).
2. Whether the rape and gross-sexual-imposition convictions were against the manifest weight of the evidence.
3. Whether the prosecutor committed prejudicial misconduct by commenting on DNA evidence during closing argument.
4. Whether the trial court committed plain error by admitting expert testimony concerning factors used to evaluate the victim's statements and behavior.
5. Whether trial counsel was ineffective for failing to object to the expert's testimony.

HOLDINGS

1. The evidence was legally sufficient to support Stevens's rape conviction because, viewed in the light most favorable to the State, the victim's testimony and corroborating medical evidence permitted a rational jury to find the statutory elements proven beyond a reasonable doubt.
2. The rape and gross-sexual-imposition convictions were not against the manifest weight of the evidence.
3. The prosecutor's comments about DNA evidence were not improper and did not constitute prosecutorial misconduct warranting reversal.
4. The trial court did not commit plain error by admitting the expert's testimony because the testimony provided behavioral and psychological context without directly vouching for the truthfulness of the victim's statements.
5. Stevens failed to establish ineffective assistance of counsel because he did not demonstrate prejudice from counsel's failure to object to the expert's testimony.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Thus, a review of the constitutional sufficiency of the evidence to support a criminal conviction requires a court of appeals to determine whether, after viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, any rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt.” (§35)

“Direct testimony that a child is truthful is always off limits. But testimony that merely provides background or context – without crossing the line into vouching – may be admissible.” (§53)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

K.S., born March 9, 2010, stayed intermittently at Stevens's home during the summer of 2022. After leaving the home in late July, she reported vaginal pain and bleeding and disclosed to her mother and investigators that Stevens had touched her sexually and had intercourse with her. The evidence included K.S.'s consistent disclosures, medical testimony regarding vaginal pain and injuries, psychological testimony regarding trauma and behavioral consistency, and forensic evidence that was either negative or inconclusive for DNA. Stevens denied the abuse and presented testimony suggesting that the allegations arose from a family dispute involving child-support proceedings and concerns about another adult.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A Stark County grand jury indicted Stevens on one count of rape and one count of gross sexual imposition. Following a jury trial, the jury found him guilty of both offenses, and the trial court sentenced him. Stevens timely appealed, raising challenges to sufficiency and manifest weight of the evidence, prosecutorial misconduct, expert testimony concerning the victim's statements, and ineffective assistance of counsel. The court of appeals overruled all five assignments of error and affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Worley, 2021-Ohio-2207, ¶57
- State v. Jenks, 61 Ohio St.3d 259, 574 N.E.2d 492 (1991)
- State v. Smith, 80 Ohio St.3d 89, 102, 684 N.E.2d 668 (1997), fn. 4
- Jackson v. Virginia, 443 U.S. 307, 99 S.Ct. 2781, 61 L.Ed.2d 560 (1979)
- State v. Lang, 129 Ohio St.3d 512, 2011-Ohio-4215, 954 N.E.2d 596, ¶219
- State v. Thompkins, 78 Ohio St.3d 380 (1997)
- Tibbs v. Florida, 457 U.S. 31 (1982)
- State v. Martin, 20 Ohio App.3d 172, 485 N.E.2d 717 (1983)
- Seasons Coal Co., Inc. v. Cleveland, 10 Ohio St.3d 77 (1984)
- State v. King, 2023-Ohio-875, ¶36 (12th Dist.)
- State v. Lott, 51 Ohio St.3d 160, 165-166 (1990)
- Darden v. Wainwright, 477 U.S. 168, 184 (1986)
- State v. Ballew, 1996-Ohio-81
- State v. Steed, 2016-Ohio-8088, ¶48 (6th Dist.)
- State v. Smith, 14 Ohio St.3d 13, 14 (1984)
- State v. Boston, 46 Ohio St.3d 108 (1989)
- State v. Stowers, 1998-Ohio-632
- State v. McCauley, 2025-Ohio-3158, ¶58 (5th Dist.)

- State v. Long, 53 Ohio St.2d 91 (1978)
- State v. Spaulding, 2016-Ohio-8126, ¶64
- Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984)
- Mansfield v. Studer, 2012-Ohio-4840 (5th Dist.)
- Lockhart v. Fretwell, 506 U.S. 364 (1993)
- Knowles v. Mirzayance, 556 U.S. 111 (2009)
- State v. Bradley, 42 Ohio St.3d 136, 538 N.E.2d 373 (1989)
- State v. Clayton, 62 Ohio St.2d 45 (1980)

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