

SUPREME COURT OF NORTH DAKOTA

State of North Dakota v. Manuel Gonzales

State v. Gonzales, 2023 ND 202 (2023) · No. No. 20230129 · Decided October 26, 2023

SUMMARY

The North Dakota Supreme Court reversed an order and amended judgment requiring Manuel Gonzales to pay \$556 in restitution after he pleaded guilty to unlawful use of personal identifying information. The court held that the restitution for property stolen from the victim’s vehicle was not directly related to the offense of conviction under N.D.C.C. § 12.1-32-08(4).

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of North Dakota
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Daniel J. Crothers, Justice; Jon J. Jensen, Chief Justice; Lisa Fair McEvers, Justice; Jerod E. Tufte, Justice; Douglas A. Bahr, Justice
JURISDICTION	North Dakota
DECIDED	October 26, 2023
DOCKET	No. 20230129
DISPOSITION	reversed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Gonzales appealed a district court order and amended judgment imposing restitution after he pleaded guilty to unlawful use of personal identifying information.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Restitution orders are reviewed to determine whether the district court acted within the statutory limits, under a standard similar to abuse of discretion. A district court abuses its discretion when it acts arbitrarily, unreasonably, or unconscionably, when its decision is not the product of a rational mental process leading to a reasonable determination, or when it misinterprets or misapplies the law.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published North Dakota Supreme Court opinion; precedential.
PARTIES	Manuel Gonzales v. State of North Dakota

TOPICS

- restitution criminal
- criminal procedure
- statutory interpretation
- appellate procedure
- standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

criminal procedure

restitution

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the district court could order restitution for property stolen from a victim's vehicle when Gonzales pleaded guilty to unlawful use of personal identifying information.
2. Whether the restitution order was limited to damages directly related to the criminal offense under N.D.C.C. § 12.1-32-08(4).

HOLDINGS

1. Under N.D.C.C. § 12.1-32-08(4), restitution is limited to damages and expenses directly related to the criminal offense and directly resulting from the defendant's criminal conduct. Because the \$556 in losses arose from theft and was not directly related to Gonzales's conviction for unlawful use of personal identifying information, the district court erred in ordering restitution.
2. A restitution order is reviewed to determine whether the district court acted within the limits set by statute, under a standard similar to abuse of discretion.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“In determining the amount of restitution, the court shall take into account the reasonable damages sustained by the victim or victims of the criminal offense, which damages are limited to those directly related to the criminal offense and expenses actually sustained as a direct result of the defendant’s criminal action.” (¶ 4)

“Here, the district court misapplied the law and abused its discretion by ordering restitution for the victim’s loss from theft when Gonzales pleaded guilty to unauthorized use of personal identifying information.” (¶ 5)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Gonzales pleaded guilty to unlawful use of personal identifying information. The district court ordered him to pay \$556 in restitution for property stolen from the victim's vehicle: \$500 in cash from a wallet, \$45 to replace the wallet, and \$11 to replace an ATM card and driver's license. The Supreme Court concluded that the restitution was based on theft-related losses rather than losses directly related to the offense of conviction.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Gonzales pleaded guilty to unlawful use of personal identifying information. The Morton County District Court ordered him to pay \$556 in restitution for property stolen from the victim's vehicle, including cash, a wallet, an ATM card, and a driver's license. The North Dakota Supreme Court reversed the restitution order and amended judgment.

DISPOSITION

reversed

CASES CITED

- State v. Harstad, 2020 ND 151, ¶ 7, 945 N.W.2d 265
- State v. Pippin, 496 N.W.2d 50, 53 (N.D. 1993)
- State v. Carson, 2017 ND 196, ¶ 6, 900 N.W.2d 41
- State v. Harstad, 2022 ND 106, ¶ 13

OPINION

State v. Gonzales 2023 ND 202

PER CURIAM.

FILED

IN THE OFFICE OF THE

CLERK OF SUPREME COURT

OCTOBER 26, 2023

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA

IN THE SUPREME COURT

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA

2023 ND 202 State of North Dakota, Plaintiff and Appellee v. Manuel Gonzales, Defendant and Appellant No. 20230129 Appeal from the District Court of Morton County, South Central Judicial District, the Honorable James S. Hill, Judge. REVERSED. Opinion of the Court by Crothers, Justice. Chase R. Lingle, Assistant State’s Attorney, Mandan, ND, for plaintiff and appellee. Samuel A. Gereszek, Grand Forks, ND, for defendant and appellant. State v. Gonzales No. 20230129 Crothers, Justice. [¶1] Manuel Gonzales appeals a district court order and amended judgment claiming the restitution ordered by the district court was not directly related to the crime to which he pleaded guilty. We reverse. [¶2] Gonzales pleaded guilty to unlawful use of personal identifying information. The district court ordered Gonzales to make restitution of \$556.00 for the value of property stolen from the victim’s vehicle, which included \$500.00 cash in a wallet, \$45.00 to replace the wallet, and \$11.00 to replace an ATM card and driver’s license. [¶3] “When reviewing a restitution order, we look to whether the district court acted within the limits set by statute, which is a standard similar to our abuse of discretion standard.” State v. Harstad, 2020 ND 151, ¶ 7, 945 N.W.2d 265. “A district court abuses its discretion if it acts in an arbitrary, unreasonable, or unconscionable manner, if its decision is not the product of a rational mental process leading to a reasonable determination, or if it misinterprets or misapplies the law.” Id. [¶4] “In determining the amount of restitution, the court shall take into account the reasonable damages sustained by the victim or victims of the criminal offense, which damages are limited to those directly related to the criminal offense and expenses actually sustained as a direct result of the defendant’s criminal action.” N.D.C.C. § 12.1-32-08(4); see State v. Pippin, 496 N.W.2d 50, 53 (N.D. 1993) (restitution requires “an immediate and intimate causal connection between the criminal conduct and the damages or expenses for which restitution is ordered”); State v. Carson,

2017 ND 196, ¶ 6, 900 N.W.2d 41 (restitution damages are limited to damages “directly related to the criminal offense and expenses actually incurred as a direct result of the defendant’s criminal action”); Harstad, 2022 ND 106, ¶ 13 (there is no “immediate causal connection between unrecovered” property from a car and a conviction of possession of a stolen vehicle). 1 [¶5] Here, the district court misapplied the law and abused its discretion by ordering restitution for the victim’s loss from theft when Gonzales pleaded guilty to unauthorized use of personal identifying information. No evidence at the restitution hearing supported, and no part of restitution ordered by the court, was directly related to Gonzales’ conviction for unauthorized use of personal identifying information. We reverse the order and amended judgment. [¶6] Jon J. Jensen, C.J. Daniel J. Crothers Lisa Fair McEvers Jerod E. Tufte Douglas A. Bahr 2