

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Connecticut v. Barrett

479 U.S. 523 (1987) · No. No. 85-899 · Decided January 27, 1987

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court held that William Barrett's statements to police were admissible because his willingness to speak orally, coupled with his limited request for counsel before making a written statement, constituted a valid waiver of his rights. The Court reversed the Connecticut Supreme Court, concluding that the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments did not require suppression of the oral statements under *Edwards v. Arizona*.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the United States
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Chief Justice Rehnquist; Justice Brennan; Justice Blackmun; Justice O'Connor; Justice Powell; Justice Stevens; Justice White; Justice Marshall
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	January 27, 1987
DOCKET	No. 85-899
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The State of Connecticut petitioned for certiorari after the Supreme Court of Connecticut reversed Barrett's convictions and ordered suppression of his incriminating statements under <i>Edwards v. Arizona</i> .
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Court reviewed the constitutional suppression ruling de novo while accepting the trial court's factual findings concerning Barrett's understanding and waiver absent clear error.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	binding
PARTIES	Connecticut v. William Barrett

TOPICS

- miranda rights
- right to counsel
- suppression of evidence
- fifth amendment
- criminal procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a suspect who expressly declines to make a written statement without counsel but affirmatively agrees to speak orally has invoked the right to counsel for all interrogation purposes under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.
2. Whether Barrett voluntarily, knowingly, and intelligently waived his Miranda rights before making the oral statements.
3. Whether the Constitution required suppression of Barrett's oral statements under *Edwards v. Arizona*.

HOLDINGS

1. A suspect's statement that he will not make a written statement without counsel, while affirmatively stating that he is willing to discuss the matter orally, is a limited and clear invocation of counsel that does not bar the police from obtaining an oral statement.
2. The State established that Barrett voluntarily, knowingly, and intelligently waived his right to remain silent and his right to counsel for purposes of oral questioning.
3. The Constitution did not require suppression of Barrett's oral statements because his limited request for counsel was accompanied by an affirmative choice to speak, and the statements were obtained after a valid waiver.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Miranda gives the defendant a right to choose between speech and silence, and Barrett chose to speak.”
(479 U.S. at 529)

“To conclude that respondent invoked his right to counsel for all purposes requires not a broad interpretation of an ambiguous statement, but a disregard of the ordinary meaning of respondent's statement.” (479 U.S. at 530)

“It remains clear, however, that this prohibition on further questioning — like other aspects of Miranda — is not itself required by the Fifth Amendment's prohibition on coerced confessions, but is instead justified only by reference to its prophylactic purpose.” (479 U.S. at 528)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

After receiving Miranda warnings three times, William Barrett repeatedly stated that he would talk about the alleged sexual assault orally but would not provide a written statement without an attorney present. He then made oral statements admitting involvement in the assault; recording attempts failed, and an officer wrote down his recollection. The trial court found that Barrett understood his rights and voluntarily waived his right to counsel for the oral questioning, and the statements were admitted at trial.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Barrett was convicted by a jury in Connecticut of sexual assault, unlawful restraint, and possession of a controlled substance. After a suppression hearing, the trial court admitted his oral statements, finding that he had voluntarily waived his rights. The Connecticut Supreme Court reversed, concluding that Barrett's refusal to make a written statement without counsel invoked his right to counsel for all purposes. The United States Supreme Court granted certiorari and reversed.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The case was remanded to the Connecticut Supreme Court for further proceedings not inconsistent with the United States Supreme Court's opinion.

CASES CITED

- Edwards v. Arizona, 451 U.S. 477 (1981)
- Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U.S. 436 (1966)
- Smith v. Illinois, 469 U.S. 91 (1984) (per curiam)
- Moran v. Burbine, 475 U.S. 412 (1986)
- Oregon v. Elstad, 470 U.S. 298 (1985)
- Oregon v. Bradshaw, 462 U.S. 1039 (1983)
- New York v. Quarles, 467 U.S. 649, 654 (1984)
- Michigan v. Jackson, 475 U.S. 625, 633 (1986)
- Johnson v. Zerbst, 304 U.S. 458, 464 (1938)
- North Carolina v. Butler, 441 U.S. 369 (1979)
- United States v. Jardina, 747 F.2d 945, 949 (5th Cir. 1984)
- Schneckloth v. Bustamonte, 412 U.S. 218 (1973)
- Carnley v. Cochran, 369 U.S. 506, 516 (1962)
- Michigan v. Long, 463 U.S. 1032, 1068 (1983) (Stevens, J., dissenting)