

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
FOURTH JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

People v. Clark

Clark, 2026 NY Slip Op 03568 (Supreme Court of the State of New York Appellate Division Fourth Judicial Department 2026) · No. 360 KA 23-01248 · Decided June 5, 2026

SUMMARY

The New York Appellate Division, Fourth Department, unanimously affirmed Tommy L. Clark's judgment of conviction for criminal possession of controlled substances and criminally using drug paraphernalia. The court addressed evidentiary challenges involving text messages, expert testimony, untested suspected methamphetamine, and a Sandoval ruling, as well as claims concerning sentencing and preservation. The court directed correction of the certificate of conviction and uniform sentence and commitment form to reflect that Clark was sentenced as a second felony drug offender.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Lindley, J.P.; Curran, J.; Ogden, J.; Greenwood, J.; DelConte, J.
JURISDICTION	New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department
DECIDED	June 5, 2026
DOCKET	360 KA 23-01248
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant appealed from a judgment of Jefferson County Court entered after a jury convicted him of criminal possession of a controlled substance in the third degree, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the fifth degree, and criminally using drug paraphernalia in the second degree.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Unpreserved claims were reviewed under New York's preservation rules, with discretionary interest-of-justice review declined. Preserved evidentiary claims were reviewed for harmless error and evidentiary admissibility. The Sandoval ruling was reviewed for abuse of discretion, and the sentence was reviewed for whether it was unduly harsh or severe.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE

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Tommy L. Clark v. The People of the State of New York

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court improperly admitted text messages and a detective's expert interpretation of those messages.
2. Whether untested smaller bags of suspected methamphetamine were admissible when a tested sample from a larger bag was positive for methamphetamine.
3. Whether the trial court abused its discretion in permitting inquiry into defendant's prior convictions under its Sandoval ruling.
4. Whether defendant preserved his claim that the sentence penalized him for exercising his right to a trial.
5. Whether the sentence was unduly harsh or severe.
6. Whether the certificate of conviction and uniform sentence and commitment form required correction to reflect defendant's status as a second felony drug offender.

HOLDINGS

1. The preserved portions of defendant's challenge to the admission of the text messages and detective's testimony did not warrant reversal because any error was harmless; the unpreserved portions were not reviewed in the interest of justice.
2. The trial court properly admitted the four untested smaller bags of suspected methamphetamine because they were probative of intent to sell and a reasonable jury could conclude that they contained the same substance as the tested material from the larger bag.
3. The Sandoval ruling was not an abuse of discretion merely because the prior convictions were similar to the charged offenses.
4. The claim that defendant was penalized at sentencing for exercising his right to a trial was unpreserved because defendant failed to raise it at sentencing, and the court did not review it in the interest of justice.
5. The sentence was not unduly harsh or severe.
6. The certificate of conviction and uniform sentence and commitment form must be amended to state that defendant was sentenced as a second felony drug offender rather than as a second felony offender.

KEY QUOTATIONS

*"the record does not indicate a failure by the . . . court to balance the relevant factors," and the ruling, by "permitt[ing] inquiry about . . . defendant's prior convictions but forb[idding] reference to the underlying criminal acts, reflects sensitivity to the particular prejudice that may result when a jury is made aware of the fact that the defendant has previously committed crimes that are similar to the charged crime[s]" ([*2])*

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Police, acting on a tip, executed a search warrant at a hotel room where defendant was staying and recovered several bags of suspected methamphetamine. A field test and a stipulated laboratory test established methamphetamine in a sample from the large bag, while four smaller bags were not separately tested. The smaller bags contained approximately one gram each and were admitted as evidence. The jury convicted defendant of multiple drug-related offenses.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Police executed a search warrant at a hotel room where defendant was staying and recovered suspected methamphetamine. After a jury conviction, Jefferson County Court sentenced defendant. On appeal, defendant challenged the admission of text messages and expert testimony, admission of untested suspected contraband, the Sandoval ruling, the sentence, and the accuracy of the conviction and sentencing documents. The Appellate Division unanimously affirmed, while directing correction of the certificate of conviction and uniform sentence and commitment form.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The certificate of conviction and uniform sentence and commitment form must be amended to reflect that defendant was sentenced as a second felony drug offender, not a second felony offender.

CASES CITED

- People v. Crimmins, 36 NY2d 230, 241-242 (1975)
- People v. Gillyard, 70 AD3d 854, 854-855 (2d Dept 2010), lv denied 14 NY3d 840 (2010)
- People v. McGriff, 201 AD2d 672, 673 (2d Dept 1994), lv denied 83 NY2d 913 (1994)
- People v. Wilcox, 198 AD2d 544, 545 (3d Dept 1993), lv denied 82 NY2d 932 (1994)
- People v. Walker, 83 NY2d 455, 459 (1994)
- People v. Bradley, 227 AD3d 1420, 1420 (4th Dept 2024), lv denied 42 NY3d 1035 (2024)
- People v. Poole, 79 AD3d 1685, 1685-1686 (4th Dept 2010), lv denied 16 NY3d 862 (2011)
- People v. Mohamed, 224 AD3d 1271, 1271-1272 (4th Dept 2024), lv denied 41 NY3d 984 (2024)
- People v. Britton, 213 AD3d 1326, 1328 (4th Dept 2023), lv denied 39 NY3d 1140 (2023)
- People v. Cruz, 182 AD3d 999, 1000 (4th Dept 2020)
- People v. Johnson, 161 AD3d 1529, 1529 (4th Dept 2018)

OPINION

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PER CURIAM.

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THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, RESPONDENT,

v TOMMY L. CLARK, DEFENDANT-APPELLANT. Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department Decided on June 5, 2026 360 KA 23-01248 Present: Lindley, J.P., Curran, Ogden, Greenwood, And Delconte, JJ. VINCENT T. PARLATO, BUFFALO, FOR DEFENDANT-APPELLANT. KRISTYNA S. MILLS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY, WATERTOWN (MORGAN R. MAYER OF COUNSEL), FOR RESPONDENT. Appeal from a judgment of the Jefferson County Court (David A. Renzi, J.), rendered March 27, 2023. The judgment convicted defendant upon a jury verdict of criminal possession of a controlled substance in the third degree, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the fifth degree and criminally using drug paraphernalia in the second degree. [*1] It is hereby ORDERED that the judgment so appealed from is unanimously affirmed. Memorandum: Defendant appeals from a judgment convicting him upon a jury verdict of, inter alia, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the third degree (Penal Law § 220.16 [7]). The police, acting on a tip, executed a search warrant at a hotel room where defendant was staying and recovered several bags of methamphetamine. On several grounds, defendant contends that County Court erred in admitting in evidence text messages and improper expert opinion of a detective interpreting those messages. Defendant's contention is preserved only in part (see CPL 470.05 [2]), and we decline to exercise our power to review the unpreserved challenges as a matter of discretion in the interest of justice (see CPL 470.15 [6] [a]). To the extent that defendant's contention is preserved for our review, we conclude that any error was harmless inasmuch as the evidence of defendant's guilt is overwhelming and there is no significant probability that he would have been acquitted in the absence of that evidence and testimony (see generally People v Crimmins , 36 NY2d 230, 241-242 [1975]). Defendant further contends that the court erred in permitting the jury to consider evidence of untested suspected contraband. The police recovered one large bag and four smaller bags of suspected methamphetamine from a dresser drawer. A detective's field test of "a small sample of the substance" indicated the presence of methamphetamine, and the parties stipulated that a subsequent laboratory test of the substance was positive for methamphetamine with an aggregate weight of slightly more than eight grams. The detective explained that laboratory personnel weighed a sufficient amount of the substance from the large bag to satisfy the charge and tested it

but did not test the entire submission. The detective testified that each of the four smaller bags contained approximately one gram of the substance. Over defense counsel's objection, the smaller bags were admitted in evidence. We conclude that the untested smaller bags of suspected methamphetamine were properly admitted inasmuch as they were probative of an intent to sell and a reasonable jury could conclude that they contained the same substance as that of the tested substance in the larger bag (see generally *People v Gillyard* , 70 AD3d 854 , 854-855 [2d Dept 2010], lv denied 14 NY3d 840 [2010]; *People v McGriff* , 201 AD2d 672 , 673 [2d Dept 1994], lv denied 83 NY2d 913 [1994]; *People v Wilcox* , 198 AD2d 544, 545 [3d Dept 1993], lv denied 82 NY2d 932 [1994]). We reject defendant's contention that the court's Sandoval ruling constituted an abuse of discretion. The fact that the prior convictions were similar to the crimes charged here does not [*2] automatically preclude their use on cross-examination (see *People v Walker* , 83 NY2d 455, 459 [1994]; *People v Bradley* , 227 AD3d 1420 , 1420 [4th Dept 2024], lv denied 42 NY3d 1035 [2024]; *People v Poole* , 79 AD3d 1685, 1685-1686 [4th Dept 2010], lv denied 16 NY3d 862 [2011]). "[T]he record does not indicate a failure by the . . . court to balance the relevant factors," and the ruling, by "permitt[ing] inquiry about . . . defendant's prior convictions but forb[idding] reference to the underlying criminal acts, reflects sensitivity to the particular prejudice that may result when a jury is made aware of the fact that the defendant has previously committed crimes that are similar to the charged crime[s]" (*Walker* , 83 NY2d at 459). Defendant failed to preserve for our review his contention that, in sentencing him, the court penalized him for exercising his right to a trial, inasmuch as he failed to raise that contention at sentencing (see *People v Mohamed* , 224 AD3d 1271 , 1271-1272 [4th Dept 2024], lv denied 41 NY3d 984 [2024]; *People v Britton* , 213 AD3d 1326, 1328 [4th Dept 2023], lv denied 39 NY3d 1140 [2023]). Contrary to defendant's further contention, we conclude that the sentence is not unduly harsh or severe. We have reviewed defendant's remaining contentions and conclude that none warrants modification or reversal of the judgment. Finally, we note that the certificate of conviction and the uniform sentence and commitment form incorrectly state that defendant was sentenced as a second felony offender and they must be amended to reflect that he was actually sentenced as a second felony drug offender (see *People v Cruz* , 182 AD3d 999, 1000 [4th Dept 2020]; *People v Johnson* , 161 AD3d 1529 , 1529 [4th Dept 2018]). Entered: June 5, 2026 Ann Dillon Flynn Clerk of the Court Court Decisions All Court Decisions Official Reports Service Bound Volumes Decision Search Resources RSS Feeds Style Manual Citation Tools Opinion Formatting & Privacy Guidelines Opinion Selection Criteria Legal Research Portal Site Index About About the Law Reporting Bureau About our Operations Contact Us Twitter Quick Contact Info 17 Lodge Street Albany, NY 12207 Phone: (518) 453-6900 Links to or from other sites do not signify endorsement or relationship with them.