

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURT OF APPEALS

In re M.N.T.

776 A.2d 1201 (D.C. 2001) · No. Nos. 99-FS-214, 99-FS-215 · Decided July 19, 2001

SUMMARY

The District of Columbia Court of Appeals held that victim impact statements are not categorically excluded from juvenile disposition hearings. Such statements may be admitted when material and relevant to rehabilitation and public safety, subject to the court's discretion. The court further held that statements the government intends to introduce must be included, or summarized, in the predisposition report provided to juvenile counsel, although the notice error in this case was harmless.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	District of Columbia Court of Appeals
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Farrell, Associate Judge; Wagner, Chief Judge; Washington, Associate Judge
JURISDICTION	District of Columbia
DECIDED	July 19, 2001
DOCKET	Nos. 99-FS-214, 99-FS-215
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	M.N.T. appealed from a juvenile delinquency disposition following his guilty plea, challenging the admission of oral victim impact statements and the lack of advance notice and opportunity to respond.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A juvenile disposition judge has broad discretion, and the appellate court does not review that exercise of discretion when the disposition is within statutory limitations. The admission of evidence at a juvenile disposition hearing is governed by whether it is material and relevant.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion; precedential
PARTIES	M.N.T. v. District of Columbia

TOPICS

- criminal procedure
- evidence
- statutory interpretation
- appellate procedure
- sentencing

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether victim impact statements are categorically inadmissible in juvenile disposition proceedings.
2. Whether the government was required to provide advance notice of the contents of intended victim impact statements through the predisposition investigation report.
3. Whether the trial court's failure to provide M.N.T. with advance notice and an opportunity to respond required a new disposition hearing or other relief.

HOLDINGS

1. Victim impact statements are not categorically prohibited in juvenile disposition hearings; a judge may admit them in the sound exercise of discretion when they are material and relevant to disposition and their admission is otherwise within statutory limitations.
2. Any victim impact statement that the government intends to introduce at a juvenile disposition hearing should be included in the predisposition report and furnished to juvenile counsel in accordance with the applicable juvenile-proceeding rule.
3. The trial court erred by denying M.N.T. the advance opportunity to respond to the victim impact statements, but the error did not affect the disposition and did not warrant reversal or a new hearing.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“the law does not prohibit the judge from admitting such statements at the hearing in the sound exercise of his or her discretion, provided that advance notice of the contents of the statements is given to the juvenile’s counsel as part of the predisposition investigation report.” (1201)

“any victim impact statement which the government intends to introduce at the disposition hearing should be made part of the predisposition report and furnished to the juvenile’s counsel in accordance with Rule 32.” (1206)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

M.N.T., who was sixteen, participated in an assault on two correctional officers during transport to the Oak Hill Youth Center, threatened to kill them, drove away in the transport van, and crashed it into a tree. He pleaded guilty to the allegations. At disposition, the officers described continuing physical, psychological, and financial consequences of the assault, and the judge committed M.N.T. to Oak Hill until no later than his twenty-first birthday, subject to periodic court review.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

M.N.T. pleaded guilty in the Family Division of the Superior Court to allegations including assaulting two correctional officers while confined at the Oak Hill Youth Center. At the disposition hearing, the court admitted oral victim impact statements from the officers and committed M.N.T. to Oak Hill for an indeterminate period not exceeding his twenty-first birthday. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals held that victim impact

statements may be admitted in juvenile disposition proceedings within the trial judge's discretion, held that advance notice was required through the predisposition report, found the lack of notice to be error, concluded the error was harmless, and affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Brown v. United States, 579 A.2d 1158, 1160 (D.C. 1990)
- In re L.J., 546 A.2d 429, 435, 438 (D.C. 1988)
- Collins v. United States, 631 A.2d 48, 50 (D.C. 1993)
- In re J.D.C., 594 A.2d 70, 76 (D.C. 1991)
- Payne v. Tennessee, 501 U.S. 808, 820, 825, 827 (1991)
- Thompson v. United States, 745 A.2d 308, 316 n. 9 (D.C. 2000)
- In re T.R.J., 661 A.2d 1086, 1088 (D.C. 1995)
- In re W.L., 603 A.2d 839, 840-41 (D.C. 1991)
- In re M.C.S., 555 A.2d 463, 463 n. 1 (D.C. 1989)
- McClain v. United States, 601 A.2d 80, 82 (D.C. 1992)

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