

SUPREME COURT OF CONNECTICUT

State v. Ouellette, 271 Conn. 740

859 A.2d 907 (2004) · No. No. 16694 · Decided November 16, 2004

SUMMARY

The Connecticut Supreme Court affirmed Michael Ouellette’s murder conviction after a three-judge trial. The court rejected challenges to his waiver of a jury trial and probable cause hearing, his plea of not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect, and the denial of a presentence psychiatric examination. The court held that the waivers were knowing and voluntary and that the asserted canvassing deficiencies did not warrant relief.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Connecticut
WRITING FOR THE COURT	PALMER, J.; Borden, J.; Katz, J.; Palmer, J.; Vertefeuille, J.; Zarella, J.
JURISDICTION	Connecticut
DECIDED	November 16, 2004
DOCKET	No. 16694
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	After a three-judge trial court found the defendant guilty of murder and sentenced him to sixty years of imprisonment, the defendant appealed directly to the Supreme Court of Connecticut, challenging his jury-trial waiver, probable-cause-hearing waiver, failure to canvass his plea-related assertion of mental disease or defect, and denial of a presentence psychiatric examination.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Constitutional waiver claims were reviewed for compliance with constitutional requirements under the totality of the circumstances. The denial of a presentence psychiatric examination under General Statutes § 17a-566 was reviewed for abuse of discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion of the Supreme Court of Connecticut; precedential.
PARTIES	Michael Ouellette v. State of Connecticut

TOPICS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the defendant knowingly, voluntarily, and intelligently waived his federal and state constitutional rights to a jury trial.
2. Whether the defendant knowingly and voluntarily waived his constitutional right to a probable cause hearing.
3. Whether due process required the trial court to canvass the defendant concerning his assertion of not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect.
4. Whether the trial court abused its discretion by denying the defendant's motion for a presentence psychiatric examination under General Statutes § 17a-566.

HOLDINGS

1. A defendant who has been found competent to stand trial is competent to waive the right to a jury trial, and the defendant's waiver was knowing, voluntary, and intelligent under the totality of the circumstances.
2. The defendant's waiver of the probable cause hearing was knowing and voluntary and satisfied the constitutional and statutory requirements.
3. Due process did not require a canvass of the defendant concerning his assertion of not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect because the state vigorously contested the defense and the proceeding was adversarial.
4. The trial court did not abuse its discretion by denying the defendant's request for a presentence psychiatric examination under General Statutes § 17a-566.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“any criminal defendant who has been found competent to stand trial, ipso facto, is competent to waive the right to [a jury trial] as a matter of federal constitutional law.” (271 Conn. at 918)

“In the absence of any precedent or other authority to indicate that a court is constitutionally required to canvass a defendant who pleads not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect, and in view of the fact that the state vigorously contested the defense raised by the defendant, we conclude that the defendant's due process rights were not implicated by virtue of the trial court's failure to canvass him regarding his plea of not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect.” (271 Conn. at 927)

“when “the court has adequate psychiatric documentation of the defendant's mental condition, there is no need for it to utilize the statutory provisions concerning further examinations....” (271 Conn. at 929)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Michael Ouellette, who had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, beat Robert Lysz, a Roman Catholic priest, to death inside a church using a heavy brass candlestick holder. Ouellette was found the next morning hiding in the church rectory and possessing the victim's pants, wallet, credit card, and driver's license. He initially claimed self-defense but later asserted mental disease or defect and extreme emotional disturbance. After treatment and repeated evaluations, he was found competent to stand trial; the trial court nevertheless rejected both affirmative defenses and found him guilty of murder.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The defendant was charged with murder and elected a trial by a three-judge court. The trial court found him competent to stand trial, rejected his affirmative defenses of mental disease or defect and extreme emotional disturbance, found him guilty of murder, and imposed a sixty-year sentence. The Supreme Court of Connecticut rejected all four appellate claims and affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Cobb, 251 Conn. 285, 371-372, 743 A.2d 1 (1999), cert. denied, 531 U.S. 841 (2000)
- Schneckloth v. Bustamonte, 412 U.S. 218, 237 (1973)
- Johnson v. Zerbst, 304 U.S. 458, 464 (1938)
- Boykin v. Alabama, 395 U.S. 238, 243 (1969)
- Adams v. United States ex rel. McCann, 317 U.S. 269, 278 (1942)
- Godinez v. Moran, 509 U.S. 389, 398-401 (1993)
- State v. Day, 233 Conn. 813, 824, 661 A.2d 539 (1995)
- State v. Hafford, 252 Conn. 274, 296, 746 A.2d 150 (2000), cert. denied, 531 U.S. 855 (2000)
- State v. Marino, 190 Conn. 639, 645-646, 462 A.2d 1021 (1983)
- State v. Geisler, 222 Conn. 672, 684-685, 610 A.2d 1225 (1992)
- State v. Shockley, 188 Conn. 697, 711, 453 A.2d 441 (1982)
- State v. Golding, 213 Conn. 233, 239-240, 567 A.2d 823 (1989)
- Duperry v. Solnit, 261 Conn. 309, 329, 803 A.2d 287 (2002)
- Teague v. Lane, 489 U.S. 288, 316 (1989)
- Miller v. Angliker, 848 F.2d 1312, 1320 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 488 U.S. 890 (1988)
- United States v. Brown, 428 F.2d 1100, 1102-1104 (D.C. Cir. 1970)
- State v. Shegrud, 131 Wis. 2d 133, 138, 389 N.W.2d 7 (1986), cert. denied, 479 U.S. 1037 (1987)
- People v. Vanley, 41 Cal. App. 3d 846, 853, 856, 116 Cal. Rptr. 446 (1974)
- Legrand v. United States, 570 A.2d 786, 788, 792-794 (D.C. 1990)
- State v. Higgins, 265 Conn. 35, 61 n.26, 826 A.2d 1126 (2003)
- Connelly v. Commissioner of Correction, 258 Conn. 394, 405, 780 A.2d 903 (2001)

- State v. Chance, 236 Conn. 31, 62, 671 A.2d 323 (1996)
- State v. DeAngelis, 200 Conn. 224, 241, 511 A.2d 310 (1986)
- State v. Relliford, 63 Conn. App. 442, 450, 775 A.2d 351 (2001)
- State v. Gates, 198 Conn. 397, 404-405, 503 A.2d 163 (1986)

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