

COURT OF APPEAL OF LOUISIANA, SECOND CIRCUIT

State of Louisiana v. Atari P. Woods

No. 56,622-KA (La. Ct. App. Dec. 17, 2025) · No. 56,622-KA · Decided December 17, 2025

SUMMARY

The Louisiana Court of Appeal, Second Circuit, affirmed Atari P. Woods's conviction and ten-year hard-labor sentence for introducing contraband into a penal institution. The court rejected his constitutional excessive-sentence claim, concluding that the trial court properly considered the sentencing guidelines, his extensive criminal history, prior probation revocations, and the benefit of his plea agreement.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Court of Appeal of Louisiana, Second Circuit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Stone, J.; Pitman, J.; Ellender, J.
JURISDICTION	Court of Appeal of Louisiana, Second Circuit
DECIDED	December 17, 2025
DOCKET	56,622-KA
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Woods appealed his conviction and ten-year hard-labor sentence for introduction of contraband into a penal institution after pleading guilty pursuant to a plea agreement.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	An excessive-sentence claim is reviewed to determine whether the trial court adequately considered La. C. Cr. P. art. 894.1 and whether the sentence is constitutionally excessive. A sentence within statutory limits will not be set aside absent a manifest abuse of discretion. Constitutional excessiveness is assessed under the gross-disproportionality and purposeless-and-needless-pain standards.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Louisiana Court of Appeal opinion
PARTIES	Atari P. Woods v. State of Louisiana

TOPICS

- sentencing
- cruel and unusual punishment
- plea bargaining
- standard of review
- appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

criminal procedure

sentencing

appellate practice

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Woods's ten-year sentence for introduction of contraband into a penal institution was constitutionally excessive under the Louisiana and United States Constitutions.
2. Whether Woods could pursue pro se claims that the trial court abused its discretion and that he received ineffective assistance of counsel after pleading guilty and waiving his right to appeal.

HOLDINGS

1. Because Woods waived his right to appeal by pleading guilty, his pro se claims of abuse of discretion and ineffective assistance of counsel were pretermitted.
2. The ten-year sentence for introducing contraband into a penal institution was not constitutionally excessive and did not constitute a manifest abuse of the trial court's sentencing discretion.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“After thoroughly reviewing the 894.1 guidelines, Woods’ plea agreement, and presentence investigation report, the trial court properly tailored a sentence specific to Woods.” (p. 5)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

During a probation-and-parole home check, officers found methamphetamine and drug paraphernalia at a residence where Woods was present, although the residence was not registered with probation and parole. Additional methamphetamine was found in Woods's pants pocket when he was booked into jail. Woods pleaded guilty to introducing contraband into a penal institution after receiving dismissal of the remaining felony charges and protection from a habitual-offender bill. The trial court imposed ten years at hard labor, relying on Woods's extensive criminal history, repeated probation revocations, relapse after treatment, and the benefits of the plea agreement.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Woods was charged with multiple felony drug offenses and introduction of contraband into a penal institution. During jury selection, he pleaded guilty to the contraband charge in exchange for dismissal of the other felony charges and the State's agreement not to file a habitual-offender bill. The trial court denied Woods's pro se motion to withdraw the plea, imposed the statutory maximum sentence of ten years at hard labor, and denied his motion to reconsider without a hearing. The Louisiana Second Circuit affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Dowles, 54,483 (La. App. 2 Cir. 5/25/22), 339 So. 3d 749
- State v. Vanhorn, 52,583 (La. App. 2 Cir. 4/10/19), 268 So. 3d 357, writ denied, 20-00745 (La. 11/19/19), 282 So. 3d 1065
- State v. Smith, 433 So. 2d 688 (La. 1983)
- State v. Croskey, 53,505 (La. App. 2 Cir. 5/20/20), 296 So. 3d 1151
- State v. Sepulvado, 367 So. 2d 762 (La. 1979)
- State v. Smith, 01-2574 (La. 1/14/03), 839 So. 2d 1
- State v. Dorthey, 623 So. 2d 1276 (La. 1993)
- State v. Bonanno, 384 So. 2d 355 (La. 1980)
- State v. Weaver, 01-0467 (La. 1/15/02), 805 So. 2d 166
- State v. Meadows, 51,843 (La. App. 2 Cir. 1/10/18), 246 So. 3d 639, writ denied, 18-0259 (La. 10/29/18), 254 So. 3d 1208
- State v. Williams, 03-3514 (La. 12/13/04), 893 So. 2d 7
- State v. Gaines, 54,383 (La. App. 2 Cir. 2/22/23), 358 So. 3d 194, writ denied, 23-00363 (La. 6/21/23), 362 So. 3d 428
- State v. Tubbs, 52,417 (La. App. 2 Cir. 11/20/19), 285 So. 3d 536, writ denied, 20-00307 (La. 7/31/20), 300 So. 3d 404, on reconsideration, writ denied, 20-00307 (La. 9/8/20), 301 So. 3d 30

OPINION

State of Louisiana v. Atari P. Woods

STONE, J.

Judgment rendered December 17, 2025. Application for rehearing may be filed within the delay allowed by Art. 922, La. C. Cr. P. No. 56,622-KA

COURT OF APPEAL

SECOND CIRCUIT

STATE OF LOUISIANA

***** STATE OF LOUISIANA Appellee versus ATARI P. WOODS Appellant ***** Appealed from the Forty-Second Judicial District Court for the Parish of DeSoto, Louisiana Trial Court No. 24CR34867 Honorable Amy Burford McCartney, Judge ***** LOUISIANA APPELLATE PROJECT Counsel for Appellant By: Chad Ikerd ATARI P. WOODS Pro Se CHARLES BLAYLOCK ADAMS Counsel for Appellee District Attorney EDWIN L. BLEWER, III

PAMELA ROXANNE MOSER

Assistant District Attorneys ***** Before PITMAN, STONE, and ELLENDER, JJ. STONE, J. This appeal arises from the Forty-Second Judicial District Court, the Honorable Amy Buford McCartney, presiding. In an amended bill of information, Atari P. Woods (“Woods”) was charged with three counts of felony drug possession that include: possession with the intent to distribute a Schedule II CDS, a violation of La. R.S. 40:967(A)(1) and (B)(1)(a); possession of a Schedule II

CDS less than two grams, a violation of La. R.S. 40:967(C)(1); and introduction of contraband into a penal institution, a violation of La. R.S. 14:402. Woods pled guilty to introduction of contraband into a jail in exchange for the state's dismissal of the remaining felony charges. Woods was thereafter sentenced to 10 years at hard labor and this appeal followed.

FACTS

On June 25, 2024, Narcotics agents with the DeSoto Parish Sheriff's Office assisted probation and parole with a home check after being informed that Woods was involved in drug distribution.¹ When officers arrived to conduct the check, Woods was the only individual at the residence. Notably, this residence was not registered with the state probation and parole office, however, a tip from a confidential informant revealed that Woods was living there. During the search, deputies found drugs in a light fixture located in the kitchen and on Woods' person, and also drug paraphernalia.² As this was a probation violation, Woods was arrested and booked into the DeSoto Parish Detention Facility. Upon booking, more drugs were found in his pants pocket. Testing at the Shreveport crime lab determined that the drugs found at the residence, and in Woods' possession at the jail, were methamphetamine. Accordingly, he was charged with introduction of contraband into a penal facility. The original bill of information charged Woods with one count of possession with intent to distribute; one count of possession of schedule II CDS less than two grams; one count of introduction (or sending) of contraband into a penal institution; and three counts of aggravated cruelty to animals.³ In the months leading up to trial, Woods filed a series of pro se motions with the court, most of which were not adopted by his appointed counsel, resulting in his presentation of argument for himself.⁴ Woods' pro se motions were unsupported by Louisiana law and were all denied by the trial court. The matter proceeded to trial. During jury selection, Woods elected to plead guilty in exchange for the state dismissing two of the three felony charges and not filing a multi-bill against him. On January 28, 2025, Woods pled guilty to introduction of contraband into a penal institution. Sentencing was left to the trial court, and a presentence investigation report was ordered. Prior to sentencing, Woods filed a pro se motion to withdraw his guilty plea, asserting that he did not consent to a presentence investigation.³ On the property during the search, 3 small dogs were chained without food, water, or shelter. The dogs were in direct sunlight and extreme heat without access to shade. Woods claimed ownership of the dogs.⁴ Motions included: (1) a motion to quash the bill of information, (2) a motion to suppress, and (3) a motion to return seized property from the search.² report and desired a more amenable plea offer from the state. The motion was denied by the trial court, and Woods was thereafter sentenced to a maximum of 10 years at hard labor. The trial court further recommended Woods for substance abuse treatment. A motion to reconsider his sentence was denied by the trial court without hearing. Woods now appeals, asserting that his sentence is excessive.

DISCUSSION

Woods filed a pro se brief asserting that (1) the trial court abused its discretion and (2) he received ineffective assistance of counsel. Because he waived his right to appeal by pleading guilty, his claims of abuse of discretion and ineffective assistance of counsel are pretermitted. In Woods' counseled brief, he asserts that his 10-year sentence is constitutionally excessive, under both state and federal constitutions, as it is shockingly disproportionate to the circumstances. An excessive sentence claim is reviewed by examining whether the trial court adequately considered the guidelines established in La. C. Cr. P. art. 894.1 and whether the sentence is constitutionally excessive. *State v. Dowles*, 54,483 (La. App. 2 Cir. 5/25/22), 339 So. 3d 749, *State v. Vanhorn*, 52,583 (La. App. 2 Cir. 4/10/19), 268 So. 3d 357, writ denied, 20-00745 (La. 11/19/19), 282 So. 3d 1065. First, the record must show that the trial court took cognizance of the criteria set forth in La. C. Cr. P. art. 894.1. The articulation of the factual basis for a sentence is the goal of La. C. Cr. P. art. 894.1, not rigid or mechanical compliance with its provision. The trial court is not required to list every aggravating or mitigating circumstance, so long as the record reflects that it adequately considered the guidelines of the 3 article. *State v. Smith*, 433 So. 2d 688 (La. 1983), *State v. Croskey*, 53,505 (La. App. 2 Cir. 5/20/20), 296 So. 3d 1151. The Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article I § 20 of the Louisiana Constitution prohibit the imposition of cruel or excessive punishment. Although a sentence falls within statutory limits, it may be excessive. *State v. Sepulvado*, 367 So. 2d 762 (La. 1979). The appellate court must determine if the sentence is constitutionally excessive. *State v. Smith*, 01-2574 (La. 1/14/03), 839 So. 2d 1. To assess a claim that a sentence violates La. Const. art. I § 20, the appellate court must determine if the sentence is grossly disproportionate to the seriousness of the offense or nothing more than a purposeless and needless infliction of pain and suffering. *State v. Dorthey*, 623 So. 2d 1276 (La. 1993), *State v. Bonanno*, 384 So. 2d 355 (La. 1980). A sentence is considered grossly disproportionate if, when the crime and punishment are viewed in light of the harm done to society, it shocks the sense of justice. *State v. Weaver*, 01- 0467 (La. 1/15/02), 805 So. 2d 166, *State v. Meadows*, 51, 843 (La. App. Cir. 1/10/18), 246 So. 3d 639, writ denied, 18-0259 (La. 10/29/18) 254 So. 3d 1208. The sentencing court has wide discretion to impose a sentence within the statutory limits, and the sentence imposed will not be set aside as excessive absent a manifest abuse of that discretion. *State v. Williams*, 03- 3514 (La. 12/13/04), 893 So. 2d 7. On review, an appellate court does not determine whether another sentence may have been more appropriate, but whether the trial court abused its discretion. *State v. Gaines*, 54,383 (La. App. 2 Cir. 2/22/23), 358 So. 3d 194, writ denied, 23-00363 (La. 6/21/23), 362 So. 3d 428; *State v. Tubbs*, 52,417 (La. App. 2 Cir. 11/20/19), 285 So. 3d 536, writ denied, 20-00307 (La. 7/31/20), 300 So. 3d 404, on recons., 20- 4 00307 (La. 9/8/20), 301 So. 3d 30, and writ denied, 20-00307 (La. 9/8/20), 301 So. 3d 30. Whoever commits the crime of introducing contraband into or upon the grounds of any correctional facility shall be imprisoned with or without hard labor for

not more than ten years. La. R.S. 14:402(G)(1). We find no abuse of discretion in the sentence imposed by the trial court. In sentencing Woods, the primary factors applied included: (1) Woods' extensive criminal history, (2) the undue risk that during a period of suspended sentence or probation, he would likely commit another crime, and (3) his substantial benefit as a result of his plea agreement. It is evident that Woods has not responded well to noncustodial treatment, a prime example being that he was under felony parole supervision at the time of his current arrest. Woods' probation has been revoked on three prior occasions for drug abuse. Although Woods completed drug treatment during a previous period of incarceration, he has almost always relapsed. Woods' repeated history of the same type of offenses over the years is significant and demonstrates his unwillingness to be rehabilitated. Lastly, Woods' presentence investigation report indicated that he was a seven-time offender, and without his plea agreement, his sentencing exposure would have been significantly higher. To reiterate, the maximum number of years a defendant may be sentenced for introducing contraband into a penal institution is ten years. After thoroughly reviewing the 894.1 guidelines, Woods' plea agreement, and presentence investigation report, the trial court properly tailored a sentence specific to Woods. The sentence in this matter is not constitutionally excessive. 5

CONCLUSION

For the reasons discussed above, Woods' conviction and sentence of ten years at hard labor are affirmed. AFFIRMED. 6