

SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT OF MAINE

State of Maine v. Derek S. Poulin

2016 ME 110 (2016) · No. Yor-15-433 · Decided July 14, 2016

SUMMARY

The Maine Supreme Judicial Court affirmed Derek S. Poulin’s convictions for murder and arson. The court held that the trial court did not abuse its discretion or violate Poulin’s right to a fair trial by excluding late-disclosed GPS data from the State’s case-in-chief while permitting potential impeachment use, or by indicating that handwritten notes might be reconsidered if Poulin presented evidence of a good relationship with the victim.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Judicial Court of Maine
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Alexander, J.; Saufley, C.J.; Mead, J.; Gorman, J.; Jabar, J.; Hjelm, J.; Humphrey, J.
JURISDICTION	Maine
DECIDED	July 14, 2016
DOCKET	Yor-15-433
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Poulin appealed from a jury conviction and sentence for murder and Class A arson, arguing that the trial court's rulings concerning late-disclosed GPS data and handwritten notes violated his constitutional right to a fair trial.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews sanctions for discovery violations for abuse of discretion and examines whether the violation and the trial court's response caused prejudice or deprived the defendant of a fundamentally fair trial. Evidentiary rulings are also reviewed for abuse of discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published and precedential opinion of the Supreme Judicial Court of Maine
PARTIES	Derek S. Poulin v. State of Maine

TOPICS

discovery criminal

evidence

hearsay

criminal procedure

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal procedure

evidence

constitutional law

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court violated Poulin's right to a fair trial by excluding late-disclosed GPS data from the State's case-in-chief while allowing its possible use to impeach defense evidence that conflicted with the data.
2. Whether the trial court violated Poulin's right to a fair trial by excluding handwritten notes as hearsay and potential character evidence while stating that it would reconsider the ruling if Poulin presented evidence that he had a good relationship with the victim.

HOLDINGS

1. A trial court does not violate a criminal defendant's right to a fair trial by excluding late-disclosed GPS evidence from the prosecution's case-in-chief while permitting the evidence to be used for impeachment if the defense presents testimony that conflicts with it, particularly where the court offers a continuance to permit preparation.
2. A trial court does not abuse its discretion or violate the defendant's right to a fair trial by excluding handwritten notes as hearsay and potential character evidence while warning that the ruling may be reconsidered if the defendant introduces evidence that would make the notes proper impeachment or rebuttal evidence.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“procedural rulings to determine whether the process struck a balance between competing concerns that was fundamentally fair.” (¶ 28)

“enhanc[e] the quality of the pretrial preparation of both the prosecution and defense and diminish[] the element of unfair surprise at trial, all to the end of making the result of criminal trials depend on the merits of the case rather than on the demerits of lawyer performance on one side or the other.” (¶ 29)

“Although the State’s breach should not be held to the defendant’s throat as a dagger, neither should it be used by him as a shield.” (¶ 34)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Poulin lived with his paternal grandmother, who was found murdered in her Old Orchard Beach home after the home was set on fire. The State's evidence indicated that Poulin gave police an account of his whereabouts that conflicted with BMV records, surveillance footage, receipts, and GPS data showing his vehicle's movements on the day of the killing. Police also found possible weapons, clothing, and a boot bearing the victim's DNA, as well as handwritten notes concerning disputes between Poulin and the victim. The GPS data was disclosed shortly before trial, and the State conceded that its late disclosure violated Maine's criminal discovery rule.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Poulin was charged by criminal complaint on October 29, 2012, and indicted in December 2012 for murder and arson. After pretrial litigation and a competency determination, a jury trial was held in June 2015 in the Unified Criminal Docket for York County. The trial court excluded the GPS data from the State's case-in-chief but permitted possible impeachment use, and excluded most handwritten notes while reserving the possibility of reconsideration if Poulin presented evidence that he had a good relationship with the victim. The jury convicted Poulin, the court imposed life imprisonment for murder and a concurrent thirty-year sentence for arson, and the Supreme Judicial Court affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Reed, 2013 ME 5, ¶ 9, 58 A.3d 1130
- State v. Cruthirds, 2014 ME 86, ¶¶ 37, 39, 96 A.3d 80
- State v. Landry, 459 A.2d 175, 177-78 (Me. 1983)
- State v. Mylon, 462 A.2d 1184, 1186 (Me. 1983)
- State v. Ledger, 444 A.2d 404, 411-12 (Me. 1982)
- State v. Thurlow, 414 A.2d 1241, 1244 (Me. 1980)
- In re A.M., 2012 ME 118, ¶ 14, 55 A.3d 463
- Walder v. United States, 347 U.S. 62, 62-66 (1954)
- State v. Dechaine, 572 A.2d 130, 135-36 (Me. 1990)
- State v. Ifill, 574 A.2d 889, 890-91 (Me. 1990)
- Kilton v. Kilton, 2016 ME 63, ¶ 5, A.3d