

SUPREME COURT OF MISSISSIPPI

James Claudy Felder v. State of Mississippi

Felder · No. No. 2002-CP-00325-SCT · Decided February 4, 2002

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Mississippi reviewed the denial of James Claudy Felder's motion for post-conviction relief following his guilty plea to manslaughter. The court upheld the voluntariness of the plea, the effectiveness of counsel, and the twenty-year sentence with a \$10,000 fine. It affirmed the assessment to the Mississippi Crime Victims' Compensation Fund but remanded for clarification because the sentencing transcript and order stated different assessment amounts.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Mississippi
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Cobb, Presiding Justice; Smith, C.J.; Waller, P.J.; Easley, J.; Graves, J.; Carlson, J.; Dickinson, J.; Randolph, J.
JURISDICTION	Mississippi
DECIDED	February 4, 2002
DOCKET	No. 2002-CP-00325-SCT
DISPOSITION	remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from the Pike County Circuit Court's denial of a motion for post-conviction collateral relief following Felder's guilty plea to manslaughter and sentencing.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Factual findings in post-conviction proceedings are reviewed for clear error; questions of law are reviewed de novo.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published, en banc Mississippi Supreme Court opinion; precedential.
PARTIES	James Claudy Felder v. State of Mississippi

TOPICS

- state post-conviction relief
- sentencing
- ineffective assistance
- plea bargaining
- statutory interpretation

PRACTICE AREAS

- criminal procedure
- post-conviction relief
- sentencing
- statutory interpretation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Felder's guilty plea was knowingly, voluntarily, and intelligently entered.
2. Whether Felder received ineffective assistance of counsel in connection with his guilty plea.
3. Whether the twenty-year prison sentence and \$10,000 fine were authorized by Mississippi law.
4. Whether the \$10,000 assessment to the Mississippi Crime Victims' Compensation Fund was authorized.
5. Whether the discrepancy between the assessment amount in the sentencing transcript and the written sentencing order required remand for clarification.

HOLDINGS

1. The guilty plea was knowingly, voluntarily, and intelligently entered because the plea colloquy established that Felder understood the consequences of the plea and the maximum penalty that could be imposed.
2. The circuit court properly denied Felder's ineffective-assistance claim because the record showed that he was represented by counsel at each stage and expressed satisfaction with counsel's representation.
3. The twenty-year prison sentence and \$10,000 fine were within the statutory limits and were not an abuse of sentencing discretion.
4. The trial court had discretion to impose a \$10,000 assessment to the Mississippi Crime Victims' Compensation Fund.
5. The matter had to be remanded for the limited purpose of clarifying the amount Felder was required to pay into the Mississippi Crime Victims' Compensation Fund.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“When reviewing a trial court's decision to deny a petition for post-conviction relief, this Court will not disturb the trial court's factual findings unless they are found to be clearly erroneous.” (¶ 4)

“So long as the sentence imposed is within the statutory limits, sentencing is generally a matter of trial court discretion.” (¶ 7)

“In viewing the above-cited statutes in pari materia, the trial court was within its discretion to order Felder to pay a \$10,000 assessment to the Crime Victims’ Compensation Fund.” (¶ 9)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Felder was indicted for felony murder by a Pike County Grand Jury and later pleaded guilty to manslaughter. The circuit court sentenced him to twenty years in prison, imposed a \$10,000 fine, and ordered a payment to the Mississippi Crime Victims' Compensation Fund, with conflicting amounts appearing in the sentencing transcript and written order. Felder sought post-conviction relief, claiming that his plea was involuntary, counsel was ineffective, and his sentence was excessive or unconstitutional.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Felder was indicted for felony murder and pleaded guilty to manslaughter. The Pike County Circuit Court imposed twenty years' imprisonment, a \$10,000 fine, and a Crime Victims' Compensation Fund assessment, then denied his post-conviction motion challenging the voluntariness of his plea, effectiveness of counsel, and sentence. The Mississippi Supreme Court affirmed those rulings but remanded for clarification of the amount of the fund assessment because the sentencing transcript and written order conflicted.

DISPOSITION

remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remand to the Pike County Circuit Court solely to clarify the amount Felder must pay into the Mississippi Crime Victims' Compensation Fund. The denial of post-conviction relief, the guilty plea ruling, the ineffective-assistance ruling, the twenty-year sentence, the \$10,000 fine, and the authority to impose the assessment were otherwise affirmed.

CASES CITED

- Brown v. State, 731 So. 2d 595, 598 (Miss. 1999)
- Green v. State, 631 So. 2d 167, 176 (Miss. 1994)
- Wallace v. State, 607 So. 2d 1184, 1188 (Miss. 1992)