

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
FOURTH JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

People v. Youngs

2020 NY Slip Op 02558 (App. Div. 2020) · No. 21 KA 17-00131 · Decided May 1, 2020

SUMMARY

The New York Appellate Division, Fourth Department unanimously affirmed a judgment convicting Daniel K. Youngs upon his guilty plea to rape in the first degree, criminal sexual act in the first degree, and attempted sexual abuse in the first degree. The court held that the defendant's waiver of the right to appeal was unenforceable because the trial court and written waiver mischaracterized the scope of appellate rights, but concluded that the sentence was not unduly harsh or severe.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Peradotto, J.P.; Carni, J.; Curran, J.; Winslow, J.; DeJoseph, J.
JURISDICTION	New York
DECIDED	May 1, 2020
DOCKET	21 KA 17-00131
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant appealed from a judgment of the Herkimer County Court entered after his guilty plea and challenging the enforceability of his appeal waiver and the severity of his sentence.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Whether the sentence is unduly harsh or severe; the court independently reviewed the sentence after determining that the appeal waiver did not bar review.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	Daniel K. Youngs v. The People of the State of New York

TOPICS

- appellate procedure
- criminal procedure
- sentencing
- right to counsel

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether defendant's purported waiver of the right to appeal was enforceable when the trial court and written waiver mischaracterized the scope of appellate rights being relinquished.
2. Whether defendant's sentence was unduly harsh or severe.

HOLDINGS

1. The purported waiver of defendant's right to appeal was not enforceable because the totality of the circumstances did not establish that defendant understood the nature of the appellate rights being waived.
2. The sentence was not unduly harsh or severe.

KEY QUOTATIONS

*"We conclude that defendant's purported waiver of the right to appeal is not enforceable inasmuch as the totality of the circumstances fails to reveal that defendant "understood the nature of the appellate rights being waived"" (*1)*

*"Although the purported waiver of the right to appeal is not enforceable and thus does not preclude our review of defendant's challenge to the severity of his sentence, we nevertheless conclude that the sentence is not unduly harsh or severe." (*1)*

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Defendant pleaded guilty to rape in the first degree, criminal sexual act in the first degree, and attempted sexual abuse in the first degree. During the plea proceedings, the trial court orally described the appeal waiver as eliminating the ability to appeal decisions to a higher court and otherwise characterized it as an absolute bar to an appeal. The written waiver also stated that defendant was waiving the right to appointed appellate counsel and the right to submit a brief and argue issues concerning his sentence and conviction.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Herkimer County Court convicted defendant upon his guilty plea to rape in the first degree, criminal sexual act in the first degree, and attempted sexual abuse in the first degree, and rendered judgment on January 6, 2017. Defendant appealed to the Appellate Division, Fourth Department. The Appellate Division held that the purported appeal waiver was unenforceable but affirmed the judgment after determining that the sentence was not unduly harsh or severe.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- People v. Thomas, 2019 NY Slip Op 08545
- People v. Cole, 181 AD3d 1329 (4th Dept. 2020)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

People v Youngs (2020 NY Slip Op 02558) People v Youngs 2020 NY Slip Op 02558 Decided on May 1, 2020 Appellate Division, Fourth Department Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431. This opinion is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports. Decided on May 1, 2020 SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department PRESENT: PERADOTTO, J.P., CARNI, CURRAN, WINSLOW, AND DEJOSEPH, JJ. 21 KA 17-00131 [*1]THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, RESPONDENT, vDANIEL K. YOUNGS, DEFENDANT-APPELLANT.

PETER J. DIGIORGIO, JR., UTICA, FOR DEFENDANT-APPELLANT. JEFFREY S. CARPENTER, DISTRICT ATTORNEY, HERKIMER (ROBERT R. CALLI OF COUNSEL), FOR RESPONDENT. Appeal from a judgment of the Herkimer County Court (Donald E. Todd, A.J.), rendered January 6, 2017.

The judgment convicted defendant upon a plea of guilty of rape in the first degree, criminal sexual act in the first degree and attempted sexual abuse in the first degree. It is hereby ORDERED that the judgment so appealed from is unanimously affirmed. Memorandum: Defendant appeals from a judgment convicting him upon his plea of guilty of rape in the first degree (Penal Law § 130.35 [3]), criminal sexual act in the first degree (§ 130.50 [1]), and attempted sexual abuse in the first degree (§§ 110.00, 130.65 [1]).

We conclude that defendant's purported waiver of the right to appeal is not enforceable inasmuch as the totality of the circumstances fails to reveal that defendant "understood the nature of the appellate rights being waived" (People v Thomas, — NY3d &mdash, &mdash, 2019 NY Slip Op 08545, *4 [2019]). County Court's oral explanation of the waiver suggested that defendant was entirely ceding any ability to challenge his guilty plea on appeal, but such an "improper description of the scope of the appellate rights relinquished by the waiver is refuted by... precedent, whereby a defendant retains the right to appellate review of very selective fundamental issues, including the voluntariness of the plea" (id. at &mdash, 2019 NY Slip Op 08545, *7).

In addition, by further explaining that the cost of the plea bargain was that defendant would no longer have the right ordinarily afforded to other defendants to appeal to a higher court any decision the court had made, the court "mischaracterized the waiver of the right to appeal, portraying it in effect as an absolute bar' to the taking of an appeal" (People v Cole, 181 AD3d 1329, — [4th Dept 2020]; see Thomas, — NY3d at &mdash, 2019 NY Slip Op 08545, *6).

The written waiver executed by defendant did not contain clarifying language; instead, it perpetuated the mischaracterization that the appeal waiver constituted an absolute bar to the taking of a first-tier direct appeal and even stated that the rights defendant was waiving included the "right to have an attorney appointed" if he could not afford one and the "right to submit a brief and argue before an appellate court issues relating to [his] sentence and conviction" (see Thomas, — NY3d at &mdash, &mdash, 2019 NY Slip Op 08545, *2, *6-7).

Where, as here, the "trial court has utterly mischaracterized the nature of the right a defendant was being asked to cede,' [this] [C]ourt cannot be certain that the defendant comprehended the nature of the waiver of appellate rights' " (id. at &mdash, 2019 NY Slip Op 08545, *6).

Although the purported waiver of the right to appeal is not enforceable and thus does not preclude our review of defendant's challenge to the severity of his sentence, we nevertheless conclude that the sentence is not unduly harsh or severe. Entered: May 1, 2020 Mark W. Bennett Clerk of the Court