

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

Matter of Smith v. Munoz

2026 NY Slip Op 03170 · No. 2024-03313 · Decided May 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, Second Department affirmed an order denying the father's objections to the denial of his motion to vacate default orders in a child-support enforcement proceeding. The court held that although the father showed a reasonable excuse and no intent to default, he failed to establish a potentially meritorious defense.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per curiam; Colleen D. Duffy, J.P.; Deborah A. Dowling, J.; Janice A. Taylor, J.; Laurence L. Love, J.
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Second Department
DECIDED	May 20, 2026
DOCKET	2024-03313
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from an order of the Family Court, Kings County, denying the father's objections to a Support Magistrate's order denying his motion to vacate default orders in a child-support enforcement proceeding.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A motion to vacate a default requires a reasonable excuse for the default and a potentially meritorious claim or defense.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published
PARTIES	David Munoz v. Brenna Marie Smith

TOPICS

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child support

default judgment

appellate procedure

remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the father's default should be vacated based on his tardy appearance at the child-support hearing.
2. Whether the father established a potentially meritorious defense sufficient to vacate the default orders.

HOLDINGS

1. A party seeking to vacate a default must establish both a reasonable excuse for the default and a potentially meritorious claim or defense.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A party seeking to vacate a default must establish a reasonable excuse for the default, as well as a potentially meritorious claim or defense” ([*2])

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The parties, who have two children, were divorced by a Bahamian decree requiring the father to pay child support. During the mother's enforcement proceeding, the father appeared at the first three virtual hearing dates and received two short adjournments based on illness. He failed to timely appear at the third adjourned hearing because he was attending a virtual corporate annual meeting, and the Support Magistrate had already deemed him in default and set a purge amount when he appeared. The resulting orders found a willful child-support violation, entered judgment for \$398,200 in arrears, and recommended incarceration unless the father paid that amount.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The mother commenced a Family Court Act article 4 proceeding alleging that the father willfully violated the child-support provisions of the parties' Bahamian divorce decree. After the father failed to timely appear at a hearing, the Support Magistrate entered default orders finding a willful violation, directing entry of a money judgment for \$398,200 in arrears, and recommending incarceration unless the father paid the purge amount. The Support Magistrate denied the father's motion to vacate, and the Family Court denied his objections. The Appellate Division affirmed on different grounds.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Matter of Cheung v Kinsey, 234 AD3d 958, 960
- Matter of A & F Scaccia Realty Corp. v New York City Dept. of Environmental Protection, 200 AD3d 875, 878

- Gately v Drummond, 161 AD3d 947, 949
- Matter of Espinal-Melendez v Vasquez, 160 AD3d 852, 854
- Matter of Heinz v Faljean, 57 AD3d 665, 666

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

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Matter of Smith v Munoz

2026 NY Slip Op 03170

May 20, 2026

Appellate Division, Second Department

Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431.

This decision is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports.

In the Matter of Brenna Marie Smith, respondent,

v

David Munoz, appellant.

Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department

Decided on May 20, 2026

2024-03313, (Docket No. F-2874-18/22C)

Colleen D. Duffy, J.P.

Deborah A. Dowling

Janice A. Taylor

Laurence L. Love, JJ.

Law Office of Tzvi Y. Hagler, P.C., Valley Stream, NY, for appellant.

Elliot Green, Brooklyn, NY, for respondent.

DECISION & ORDER

In a proceeding pursuant to Family Court Act article 4, the father appeals from an order of the Family Court, Kings County (Linda Capitti, J.), dated March 19, 2024.

The order denied the father's objections to an order of the same court (Gabriella F. Richman, S.M.) dated January 18, 2024, which denied the father's motion to vacate three prior orders of the same court (Jennifer L. Castaldi, S.M.), all dated August 3, 2023, which, upon his default in appearing, inter alia, found that he willfully violated the child support provisions of the parties' divorce decree, directed the entry of a money judgment for child support arrears, and recommended the incarceration of the father unless he paid a purge amount of \$398,200.

ORDERED that the order dated March 19, 2024, is affirmed, without costs or disbursements.

The parties are the parents of two children.

The parties were divorced by a decree issued by a court in the Bahamas. The divorce decree, inter alia, directed the father to pay child support.

In March 2022, the mother commenced this

proceeding, alleging that the father had willfully violated the child support provisions of the divorce decree.

The Support Magistrate conducted a hearing as to the mother's petition, at which the father appeared for the first three virtual hearing dates. Thereafter, the father was granted short adjournments of two additional scheduled hearing dates on the ground of illness.

On the third adjourned date, the father failed to timely appear. The father's attorney informed the Support Magistrate that the father was attending a virtual corporate "annual meeting" and was expected to join the hearing shortly. When the father thereafter appeared, although the Support Magistrate placed the father under oath, it had already deemed the father to be in default and had set a purge amount.

Upon the father's default, in an order of fact-finding, order of disposition, and order directing the entry of a money judgment (hereinafter collectively the default orders), all dated August 3, 2023, the Support Magistrate, inter alia, granted the mother's petition and determined that the father had willfully violated the child support provisions of the divorce decree.

The Support Magistrate also recommended that the father be committed to jail for no more than six months unless he paid a purge amount of the full amount of the child support arrears, \$398,200.

Thereafter, the father moved to vacate the default orders.

The mother opposed the motion. By order dated January 18, 2024, the Support Magistrate denied the father's motion. The father then filed objections to the Support Magistrate's order. By order dated March 19, 2024, the Family Court denied the father's objections.

The father appeals. We affirm, albeit on grounds different than those determined by the Family Court.

A party seeking to vacate a default must establish a reasonable excuse for the default, as well as a potentially meritorious claim or defense (*see* CPLR 5015[a][1]; *Matter of Cheung v Kinsey*, 234 AD3d 958, 960).

Here, although the father showed no intent to default where he was tardy to the hearing and had appeared for prior hearing dates and there was no showing of prejudice to the mother (*see* *Matter of A & F Scaccia Realty Corp. v New York City Dept. of Env'tl. Protection*, 200 AD3d 875, 878; *Gately v Drummond*, 161 AD3d 947, 949), the father failed to establish a potentially meritorious defense (*see* *Matter of Espinal-Melendez v Vasquez*, 160 AD3d 852, 854; *Matter of Heinz v Faljean*, 57 AD3d 665, 666).

Accordingly, the Family Court properly denied the father's objections to the order dated January 18, 2024.

The father's remaining contentions are without merit.

DUFFY, J.P., DOWLING, TAYLOR and LOVE, JJ., concur.

ENTER:

Darrell M. Joseph

Clerk of the Court

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PER CURIAM.

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2024-03313, (Docket No. F-2874-18/22C) Colleen D. Duffy, J.P. Deborah A. Dowling Janice A.
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Elliot Green, Brooklyn, NY, for respondent. [*1] DECISION & ORDER In a proceeding pursuant
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Accordingly, the Family Court properly denied the father's objections to the order dated January 18, 2024. The father's remaining contentions are without merit. DUFFY, J.P., DOWLING, TAYLOR and LOVE, JJ., concur. ENTER: Darrell M. Joseph Clerk of the Court

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