

OHIO COURT OF APPEALS, NINTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

State v. Stefanko

2026-Ohio-1143 (9th Dist. 2026) · No. 31056 · Decided March 31, 2026

SUMMARY

The Ninth District Court of Appeals of Ohio affirmed Erica Stefanko's convictions for aggravated murder and murder arising from the killing of A.B. Stefanko argued that the verdicts were against the manifest weight of the evidence and challenged the sufficiency of evidence supporting her complicity through aiding and abetting. The court held that the jury reasonably could find that Stefanko and Chad Cobb planned the murder and that the evidence supported the convictions.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Ohio Court of Appeals, Ninth Judicial District
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Donna J. Carr; Flagg Lanzinger; Sutton
JURISDICTION	Ohio Court of Appeals, Ninth Judicial District
DECIDED	March 31, 2026
DOCKET	31056
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from convictions for aggravated murder and murder following a second jury trial; appellant argued that the verdicts were against the manifest weight of the evidence.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a manifest-weight challenge, the appellate court reviews the entire record, weighs the evidence and reasonable inferences, considers witness credibility, and determines whether the trier of fact clearly lost its way and created a manifest miscarriage of justice requiring reversal and a new trial. Reversal is appropriate only in exceptional cases.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Ohio Court of Appeals opinion
PARTIES	Erica Stefanko v. State of Ohio

TOPICS

- criminal procedure
- appellate procedure
- standard of review
- evidence

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the aggravated-murder and murder verdicts were against the manifest weight of the evidence.
2. Whether the evidence was sufficient to support Stefanko's complicity by aiding and abetting, including the required criminal intent and, for aggravated murder, prior calculation and design.

HOLDINGS

1. The convictions were not against the manifest weight of the evidence because the jury did not clearly lose its way in crediting the evidence that Stefanko participated in planning and facilitating A.B.'s murder.
2. The evidence supported Stefanko's convictions as an accomplice because it showed that she supported, assisted, encouraged, cooperated with, advised, or incited the principal and shared the principal's criminal intent.
3. The evidence permitted the jury to find prior calculation and design because the circumstances showed advance reasoning, preparation, and a scheme designed to implement a calculated decision to kill.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“In determining whether a criminal conviction is against the manifest weight of the evidence, an appellate court must review the entire record, weigh the evidence and all reasonable inferences, consider the credibility of witnesses and determine whether, in resolving conflicts in the evidence, the trier of fact clearly lost its way and created such a manifest miscarriage of justice that the conviction must be reversed and a new trial ordered.” (¶ 11)

“To support a conviction for complicity by aiding and abetting . . . , the evidence must show that the defendant supported, assisted, encouraged, cooperated with, advised, or incited the principal in the commission of the crime, and that the defendant shared the criminal intent of the principal.” (¶ 14)

“The jury could have reasonably found that Stefanko and Cobb together planned the murder of A.B.” (¶ 40)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

A.B., a pizza-delivery driver involved in a contentious custody dispute with Chad Cobb, was lured to the back of a closed business by a pizza order placed by Stefanko under a false name. Cobb encountered A.B. at the delivery site, and A.B. was later found dead in her vehicle with a zip tie around her neck and other injuries consistent with strangulation. Evidence recovered from the couple's property included items connected to the killing, and a recording made years later contained inculpatory statements by Stefanko about her role in the plan. The jury credited evidence that Stefanko and Cobb planned the murder and that Stefanko aided and abetted Cobb.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Stefanko was convicted after a second jury trial and sentenced to life imprisonment with parole eligibility after 30 years. In an earlier appeal, the Ninth District reversed because the trial court violated her confrontation rights

by permitting Chad Cobb to testify remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. After retrial, the jury again found Stefanko guilty of aggravated murder and murder, and the court affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Stefanko, 2022-Ohio-2569, ¶ 34 (9th Dist.)
- State v. Otten, 33 Ohio App.3d 339, 340 (9th Dist. 1986)
- State v. Carter, 2024-Ohio-5295, ¶ 22 (9th Dist.)
- State v. Roberts, 2025-Ohio-5120, ¶¶ 144, 146-147
- State v. Walker, 2016-Ohio-8295, ¶ 18
- State v. Suggs, 2024-Ohio-1961, ¶ 14 (9th Dist.)
- State v. Johnson, 93 Ohio St.3d 240 (2001)

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