

SUPREME COURT OF WYOMING

Steven R. Barela v. State

2017 WY 66 (Wyo. 2017) · No. S-16-0284 · Decided June 2, 2017

SUMMARY

The Wyoming Supreme Court dismissed Steven R. Barela’s appeal because the district court lacked jurisdiction over his motions seeking Department of Corrections records and review or clarification of his sentence. The court held that the criminal case was final, that no applicable statute or rule authorized the requested relief, and that the sentence had already been determined to be legal. The court also ordered Barela to show cause why filing restrictions should not be imposed on future filings related to his criminal case.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Wyoming
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Kautz, Justice; Burke, Chief Justice; Hill, Justice; Davis, Justice; Fox, Justice
JURISDICTION	Wyoming
DECIDED	June 2, 2017
DOCKET	S-16-0284
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Barela appealed from the Albany County District Court’s order denying two post-judgment motions in his criminal case: a motion seeking Department of Corrections records and a motion seeking de novo review or clarification of his sentence. The Wyoming Supreme Court dismissed the appeal for lack of jurisdiction and ordered Barela to show cause why filing restrictions should not be imposed.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Subject-matter jurisdiction is a question of law reviewed de novo. The Supreme Court may affirm on any proper legal ground supported by the record.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Wyoming Supreme Court opinion; precedential
PARTIES	Steven R. Barela v. State of Wyoming

TOPICS

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PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the district court had subject-matter jurisdiction within Barela's final criminal case to entertain his motion seeking Department of Corrections records under public-records and criminal-history statutes.
2. Whether the district court had jurisdiction to review or clarify Barela's sentence, require parole, or modify a legal sentence more than one year after it was imposed.
3. Whether the Wyoming Supreme Court had appellate jurisdiction over the district court's rulings when the district court lacked jurisdiction over the underlying motions.
4. Whether filing restrictions should be imposed because Barela had repeatedly filed vexatious, baseless, or frivolous matters.

HOLDINGS

1. A district court has no jurisdiction within a completed criminal case to adjudicate a defendant's civil claim against a state agency for access to Department of Corrections records, absent a statute or rule specifically conferring that jurisdiction.
2. A district court lacks jurisdiction to grant a request for sentencing clarification, compel parole, or modify a legal sentence more than one year after imposition when no applicable statute or rule authorizes the requested relief.
3. When the district court lacked subject-matter jurisdiction over the motions, the Wyoming Supreme Court likewise lacked jurisdiction to consider an appeal from their denial.
4. A court may impose prospective filing restrictions on an abusive litigant when the litigant's lengthy abusive history is established, the restrictions provide guidelines for obtaining permission to file, and the litigant receives notice and an opportunity to object.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Subject matter jurisdiction is the power to hear and determine cases of the general class to which the proceedings in question belong." (¶ 5)

"A district court has no jurisdiction within a criminal case to entertain a defendant's civil claims against a state agency." (¶ 6)

"The district court had no jurisdiction to consider either of Mr. Barela's motions, and consequently this Court has no jurisdiction." (¶ 17)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Barela was convicted after pleading guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to twenty-eight years to life. More than twenty years after sentencing and after the conviction had become final, he filed a motion seeking copies of Department of Corrections records under public-records and criminal-history statutes. He also sought clarification or de novo review of his sentence, an order requiring parole, and a different maximum term. The district court denied both motions.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Barela pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in 1995 and received a sentence of twenty-eight years to life. His prior attempts to obtain sentence reduction, withdraw his guilty plea, obtain post-conviction relief, and challenge the legality of his sentence were unsuccessful. In August 2016, he filed the two motions at issue in the original criminal case; the district court denied them, and he appealed. The Supreme Court held that the district court lacked jurisdiction over both motions and that the Supreme Court consequently lacked appellate jurisdiction. It dismissed the appeal and issued an order to show cause concerning filing restrictions.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Barela v. State, 936 P.2d 66 (Wyo. 1997)
- Barela v. State, 2002 WY 143, 55 P.3d 11 (Wyo. 2002)
- Barela v. State, 2016 WY 68, 375 P.3d 783 (Wyo. 2016)
- Allgier v. State, 2015 WY 137, ¶ 11, 358 P.3d 1271, 1275 (Wyo. 2015)
- Lee v. State, 2007 WY 81, ¶¶ 5-6, 157 P.3d 947, 948-49 (Wyo. 2007)
- Kurtenbach v. State, 2012 WY 162, ¶¶ 10-11, 290 P.3d 1101, 1104 (Wyo. 2012)
- Fuller v. State, 568 P.2d 900, 902-03 (Wyo. 1977)
- Messer v. State, 2004 WY 98, ¶¶ 13, 15, 96 P.3d 12, 17 (Wyo. 2004)
- Neidlinger v. State, 2010 WY 54, ¶ 10, 230 P.3d 306, 309 (Wyo. 2010)
- Martin v. District of Columbia Court of Appeals, 506 U.S. 1, 113 S. Ct. 397, 121 L. Ed. 2d 305 (1992)
- In re Sindram, 498 U.S. 177, 111 S. Ct. 596, 112 L. Ed. 2d 599 (1991)
- In re McDonald, 489 U.S. 180, 184, 109 S. Ct. 993, 103 L. Ed. 2d 158 (1989)
- DeLoge v. Homar, 2013 WY 33, ¶ 14, 297 P.3d 117, 121 (Wyo. 2013)
- Cosco v. Lampert, 2010 WY 52, ¶ 24, 229 P.3d 962, 974 (Wyo. 2010)
- Amin v. State, 2006 WY 84, ¶¶ 6-7, 138 P.3d 1143, 1145 (Wyo. 2006)
- McMurray v. McCelmoore, 445 F. App'x 43, 45-46 (10th Cir. 2011)
- Tripati v. Beaman, 878 F.2d 351, 354 (10th Cir. 1989)
- DePineda v. Hemphill, 34 F.3d 946, 948 (10th Cir. 1994)

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