

COURT OF APPEALS OF NORTH CAROLINA

State v. Barbour

No. COA24-664 (N.C. Ct. App. Mar. 4, 2026) · No. No. COA24-664 · Decided March 4, 2026

SUMMARY

The North Carolina Court of Appeals affirmed Dhruva Maharaja-Das Barbour’s conviction and sentence for voluntary manslaughter arising from the shooting death of Lawrence Anderson. The court held that the trial court properly denied Barbour’s motion to dismiss based on the castle doctrine, did not plainly err in its jury instructions concerning the statutory presumption of reasonable fear, and was not required to intervene ex mero motu during the State’s closing argument.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Court of Appeals of North Carolina
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Fred Gore; Griffin; Stading
JURISDICTION	North Carolina Court of Appeals
DECIDED	March 4, 2026
DOCKET	No. COA24-664
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant appealed as of right from a Stokes County Superior Court judgment entered after a voluntary-manslaughter conviction. He challenged the denial of his motion to dismiss based on the castle doctrine, the castle-doctrine jury instruction under plain-error review, and the State’s closing argument under ex mero motu review.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Denial of a motion to dismiss is reviewed de novo. Unpreserved jury-instruction challenges are reviewed for plain error, requiring a fundamental error, a probable impact on the verdict, and an exceptional effect on the fairness, integrity, or public reputation of judicial proceedings. A challenge to closing argument is reviewed to determine whether the argument was so grossly improper that the trial court erred by failing to intervene ex mero motu.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published and precedential
PARTIES	Dhruva Maharaja-Das Barbour v. State of North Carolina

TOPICS

criminal procedure

jury instructions

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PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court erred by denying Barbour's motion to dismiss on the ground that he was immune or protected under the castle doctrine.
2. Whether the trial court plainly erred by failing to instruct the jury on the circumstances listed in N.C.G.S. § 14-51.2(c) and by failing to explain that those circumstances are the only rebuttal to the castle doctrine's presumption of reasonable fear.
3. Whether the trial court erred by failing to intervene ex mero motu during the State's closing argument concerning the castle doctrine and self-defense.

HOLDINGS

1. The trial court properly denied the motion to dismiss because the State presented substantial contradictory evidence from which a rational jury could determine that Barbour did not qualify for the castle doctrine's statutory presumption or did not act in self-defense.
2. Although the trial court erred by failing to recite the circumstances listed in N.C.G.S. § 14-51.2(c), the error did not constitute plain error because Barbour failed to show that the jury probably would have reached a different verdict or that the error seriously affected the fairness, integrity, or public reputation of the proceedings.
3. The State's closing argument did not rise to the level of gross impropriety requiring the trial court to intervene ex mero motu.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“When a defendant asserts the castle doctrine defense at trial, the jury must first determine whether the defendant is entitled to the presumption as set forth in section 14-51.2(b).” (at 8)

“Our Supreme Court made clear that the trial court must instruct the jury on the factors listed in section 14-51.2(c) and in so doing, “recite the law as defined by the legislature.”” (at 11)

“On the facts of this case, as opposed to Thomas, we do not believe defendant proved the jury’s verdict probably would have differed with proper instructions.” (at 12)

“NO PLAIN ERROR, NO PREJUDICIAL ERROR.” (at 15)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Barbour and Lawrence Anderson lived in a close-knit Hare Krishna community where members commonly visited and crossed one another's property. Anderson went onto Barbour's property searching for a lawn mower that had become stuck there, and surveillance video showed Anderson interacting with Barbour and returning

toward the property after Barbour entered his house and retrieved a shotgun. As Anderson crossed the driveway and passed in front of Barbour, Barbour shot him in the head; Anderson died at the scene. The video and the parties' differing accounts created evidence concerning whether Anderson's entry was unlawful or forceful and whether Barbour reasonably feared imminent death or serious bodily harm.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Barbour was indicted for voluntary manslaughter after shooting Lawrence Anderson in the head on Barbour's property. The superior court denied Barbour's motion to dismiss based on defense of habitation, instructed the jury on the castle doctrine and self-defense, and entered judgment after the jury returned a guilty verdict. The court sentenced him to 73 to 100 months' imprisonment. The Court of Appeals affirmed the judgment, concluding there was no error, no plain error, and no prejudicial error.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Corbett, 269 N.C. App. 509, 525-28 (2020)
- State v. Chekanow, 370 N.C. 488, 492 (2018)
- State v. Fritsch, 351 N.C. 373, 379 (2000)
- State v. Carter, 254 N.C. 475, 479 (1961)
- State v. Phillips, 386 N.C. 513, 524-25, 528 (2024)
- State v. Reber, 386 N.C. 153, 158-59, 163 (2024)
- State v. Gillard, 386 N.C. 797, 820 (2024)
- State v. Thomas, 921 S.E.2d 847, 854, 862 (N.C. Ct. App. 2025)
- State v. Trull, 349 N.C. 428, 451 (1998)
- State v. Copley, 374 N.C. 224, 230 (2020)
- State v. Holloman, 369 N.C. 615, 625-26 (2017)