

COURT OF APPEALS OF OHIO, EIGHTH APPELLATE DISTRICT,
CUYAHOGA COUNTY

State v. Ponzie

2026-Ohio-655 · No. 115172 · Decided February 26, 2026

SUMMARY

The Eighth District Court of Appeals of Ohio affirmed Rahmean Ponzie’s convictions and aggregate five-to-six-year prison sentence following his guilty plea to discharge of a firearm on or near prohibited premises, felonious assault, and criminal damaging or endangering. The court held that the trial court substantially complied with Ohio Crim.R. 11 and that Ponzie failed to demonstrate prejudice from the court’s explanation of the Reagan Tokes indefinite-sentencing framework. The court also held that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in denying Ponzie’s presentence motion to withdraw his guilty plea.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Court of Appeals of Ohio, Eighth Appellate District, Cuyahoga County
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Michael John Ryan, Presiding Judge; Anita Laster Mays, Judge; Eileen A. Gallagher, Judge
JURISDICTION	Court of Appeals of Ohio, Eighth Appellate District, Cuyahoga County
DECIDED	February 26, 2026
DOCKET	115172
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Ponzie appealed his judgment of conviction and sentence following his guilty plea, challenging the voluntariness and Crim.R. 11 compliance of the plea and the denial of his presentence motion to withdraw it.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The denial of a presentence motion to withdraw a guilty plea is reviewed for abuse of discretion. For alleged nonconstitutional Crim.R. 11 deficiencies, a defendant must demonstrate prejudice unless the trial court completely failed to comply with the rule.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published appellate opinion; precedential within the Ohio Eighth Appellate District subject to applicable Ohio law.
PARTIES	Rahmean Ponzie v. State of Ohio

TOPICS

plea bargaining criminal procedure sentencing appellate procedure standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal procedure criminal appeals plea withdrawal sentencing

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Ponzie’s guilty plea was knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily entered when the trial court did not explain how his indefinite sentence would be calculated under the Reagan Tokes Law.
2. Whether the trial court abused its discretion by denying Ponzie’s presentence motion to withdraw his guilty plea.

HOLDINGS

1. The trial court did not completely fail to comply with Crim.R. 11(C)(2)(a) because it informed Ponzie that he faced an indefinite sentence, explained the minimum and maximum sentence ranges, and confirmed that he understood them. Any failure to explain the calculation of those ranges was therefore subject to the requirement that Ponzie demonstrate prejudice, which he failed to do.
2. The trial court did not abuse its discretion in denying Ponzie’s presentence motion to withdraw his guilty plea.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A trial court’s complete failure to comply with a portion of Crim.R. 11(C) also eliminates the defendant’s burden to show prejudice.” (§ 12)

“Aside from these two exceptions, the traditional rule continues to apply: a defendant is not entitled to have his [or her] plea vacated unless he [or she] demonstrates he [or she] was prejudiced by a failure of the trial court to comply with the provisions of Crim.R. 11(C).” (§ 16)

“A presentence motion to withdraw a guilty plea should be freely and liberally granted, and there is a presumption in favor of permitting a presentence plea withdrawal.” (§ 21)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On July 29, 2024, Ponzie and others were involved in an armed confrontation near his apartment complex, after which Ponzie obtained an AR-style rifle and drove with codefendants to St. Malachi Church during a community meal. Ponzie and Russell exited the vehicle and fired weapons toward Samuels near the church entrance; as they fled, Samuels returned fire and struck a passenger in Ponzie’s vehicle. Ponzie was later indicted on multiple firearm, felonious-assault, and criminal-damaging charges and ultimately pleaded guilty to three offenses under a packaged plea agreement.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A Cuyahoga County grand jury indicted Ponzie on multiple firearm, felonious-assault, and criminal-damaging charges arising from a shooting near St. Malachi Church. Pursuant to a packaged plea agreement, Ponzie pleaded guilty to discharge of a firearm on or near prohibited premises, felonious assault with a firearm specification, and criminal damaging or endangering; the remaining charges and specifications were dismissed. Before sentencing, he moved to withdraw his plea, asserting ineffective assistance and a possible self-defense claim. The common pleas court held a hearing, denied the motion, and imposed an aggregate indefinite prison term of five to six years. The appellate court affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The judgment was affirmed, and the case was remanded to the trial court for execution of the sentence. Any bail pending appeal was terminated.

CASES CITED

- State v. Darling, 2017-Ohio-7603, ¶ 24
- State v. Hlavsa, 2000 Ohio App. LEXIS 4885 (8th Dist. Oct. 19, 2000)
- State v. Cray, 1986 Ohio App. LEXIS 9344 (8th Dist. Dec. 18, 1986)
- State v. Engle, 74 Ohio St.3d 525, 527 (1996)
- State v. Nero, 56 Ohio St.3d 106, 107-108 (1990)
- State v. Poage, 2022-Ohio-467, ¶ 9
- State v. Dangler, 2020-Ohio-2765, ¶¶ 13-17
- State v. Veney, 2008-Ohio-5200, ¶ 17
- State v. Amin, 2023-Ohio-3761, ¶ 13
- State v. Barnes, 2022-Ohio-4486, ¶¶ 21-22, 32
- State v. Xie, 62 Ohio St.3d 521, 527 (1992)
- Johnson v. Abdullah, 2021-Ohio-3304, ¶ 35
- State v. Wilder, 2025-Ohio-3075, ¶¶ 20-21
- State v. Peterseim, 68 Ohio App.2d 211 (8th Dist. 1980), paragraph three of the syllabus
- State v. Fish, 104 Ohio App.3d 236 (1st Dist. 1995)
- State v. Hollowell, 2024-Ohio-4581, ¶ 17