

NO. 47011-0-II

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON
DIVISION TWO

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Respondent,

v.

MICHAEL PIERCE,

Appellant.

ON APPEAL FROM THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE
STATE OF WASHINGTON FOR JEFFERSON COUNTY

The Honorable Keith Harper, Judge

SUPPLEMENTAL BRIEF OF APPELLANT

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A. ASSIGNMENT OF ERROR

This Court should exercise its discretion to deny appellate costs should the State substantially prevail on appeal.

Issue pertaining to assignment of error

Given the serious problems with the LFO system recognized by our Supreme Court in *Blazina*, should this Court exercise its discretion to deny cost bills filed in the cases of indigent appellants?

B. SUPPLEMENTAL ARGUMENT

THIS COURT SHOULD EXERCISE ITS DISCRETION AND DECLINE TO IMPOSE APPELLATE COSTS.

The trial court entered an order of indigency finding that Pierce was entitled to seek appellate review wholly at public expense, including appointed counsel, filing fees, costs of preparation of briefs, and costs of preparation of the verbatim report of proceedings. CP 1960-61.

- a. **The serious problems *Blazina* recognized apply equally to costs awarded on appeal, and this Court should exercise its discretion to deny cost bills filed in the cases of indigent appellants.**

Our supreme court in *Blazina* recognized the “problematic consequences” legal financial obligations (LFOs) inflict on indigent criminal defendants. *State v. Blazina*, 182 Wn.2d 827, 836, 344 P.3d 680 (2015). LFOs accrue interest at a rate of 12 percent so that even persons

“who pay[] \$25 per month toward their LFOs will owe the state more 10 years after conviction than they did when the LFOs were initially assessed.” Id. This, in turn, “means that courts retain jurisdiction over the impoverished offenders long after they are released from prison because the court maintains jurisdiction until they completely satisfy their LFOs.” Id. “The court’s long-term involvement in defendants’ lives inhibits reentry” and “these reentry difficulties increase the chances of recidivism.” Id. (citing AM. CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION, IN FOR A PENNY: THE RISE OF AMERICA’S NEW DEBTOR’S PRISONS, at 68-69 (2010), available at https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/InForAPenny_web.pdf; KATHERINE A. BECKETT, ALEXES M. HARRIS, & HEATHER EVANS, WASH. STATE MINORITY & JUSTICE COMM’N, THE ASSESSMENT AND CONSEQUENCES OF LEGAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS IN WASHINGTON STATE, at 9-11, 21-22, 43, 68 (2008), available at http://www.courts.wa.gov/committee/pdf/2008LFO_report.pdf).

To confront these serious problems, our supreme court emphasized the importance of judicial discretion: “The trial court must decide to impose LFOs and must consider the defendant’s current or future ability to pay those LFOs based on the particular facts of the defendant’s case.” Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 834. Only by conducting such a “case-by-case

analysis” may courts “arrive at an LFO order appropriate to the individual defendant’s circumstances.” Id.

The Blazina court addressed LFOs imposed by trial courts, but the “problematic consequences” are every bit as problematic with appellate costs. The appellate cost bill imposes a debt for losing an appeal, which then “become[s] part of the trial court judgment and sentence.” RCW 10.73.160(3). Imposing thousands of dollars on an indigent appellant after an unsuccessful appeal results in the same compounded interest and retention of court jurisdiction. Appellate costs negatively impact indigent appellants’ ability to move on with their lives in precisely the same ways the Blazina court identified.

Although Blazina applied the trial court LFO statute, RCW 10.01.160, it would contradict and contravene Blazina’s reasoning not to require the same particularized inquiry before imposing costs on appeal. Under RCW 10.73.160(3), appellate costs automatically become part of the judgment and sentence. To award such costs without determining ability to pay would circumvent the individualized judicial discretion that Blazina held was essential before including monetary obligations in the judgment and sentence.

Pierce has been determined to qualify for indigent defense services on appeal. To require him to pay appellate costs without determining his

financial circumstances would transform the thoughtful and independent judiciary to which the Blazina court aspired into a perfunctory rubber stamp for the executive branch.

In addition, the prior rationale in State v. Blank, 131 Wn.2d 230, 930 P.2d 1213 (1997), has lost its footing in light of Blazina. The Blank court did not require inquiry into an indigent appellant's ability to pay at the time costs are imposed because ability to pay would be considered at the time the State attempted to collect the costs. Blank, 131 Wn.2d at 244, 246, 252-53. But this time-of-enforcement rationale does not account for Blazina's recognition that the accumulation of interest begins at the time costs are imposed, causing significant and enduring hardship. Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 836; see also RCW 10.82.090(1) (“[F]inancial obligations imposed in a judgment shall bear interest from the date of the judgment until payment, at the rate applicable to civil judgments.”). Moreover, indigent persons do not qualify for court-appointed counsel at the time the State seeks to collect costs. RCW 10.73.160(4) (no provision for appointment of counsel); RCW 10.01.160(4) (same); State v. Mahone, 98 Wn. App. 342, 346-47, 989 P.2d 583 (1999) (holding that because motion for remission of LFOs is not appealable as matter of right, “Mahone cannot receive counsel at public expense”). Expecting indigent defendants to shield themselves from the State's collection efforts or to petition for

remission without the assistance of counsel is neither fair nor realistic. The Blazina court also expressly rejected the State's ripeness claim that "the proper time to challenge the imposition of an LFO arises when the State seeks to collect." Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 832, n.1. Blank's questionable foundation has been thoroughly undermined by the Blazina court's exposure of the stark and troubling reality of LFO enforcement in Washington.

Furthermore, the Blazina court instructed *all* courts to "look to the comment in GR 34 for guidance." Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 838. That comment provides, "The adoption of this rule is rooted in the constitutional premise that *every level of court* has the inherent authority to waive payment of filing fees and surcharges on a case by case basis." GR 34 cmt. (emphasis added). The Blazina court also suggested, "if someone does meet the GR 34[(a)(3)] standard for indigency, courts should seriously question that person's ability to pay LFOs." Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 839. This court receives orders of indigency "as a part of the record on review." RAP 15.2(e). "The appellate court will give a party the benefits of an order of indigency throughout the review unless the trial court finds the party's financial condition has improved to the extent that the party is no longer indigent." RAP 15.2(f). This presumption of continued indigency, coupled with the GR 34(a)(3) standard, requires this

court to “seriously question” an indigent appellant’s ability to pay costs assessed in an appellate cost bill. Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 839.

This court has ample discretion to deny cost bills. RCW 10.73.160(1) states the “court of appeals . . . *may* require an adult . . . to pay appellate costs.” (Emphasis added.) “[T]he word ‘may’ has a permissive or discretionary meaning.” Staats v. Brown, 139 Wn.2d 757, 789, 991 P.2d 615 (2000). Blank, too, acknowledged appellate courts have discretion to deny the State’s requests for costs. 131 Wn.2d at 252-53. Given the serious concerns recognized in Blazina, this court should soundly exercise its discretion by denying the State’s requests for appellate costs in appeals involving indigent appellants, barring reasonable efforts by the State to rebut the presumption of continued indigency. Pierce respectfully requests that this court deny a cost bill in this case should the State substantially prevail on appeal.

- b. **Alternatively, this court should remand for superior court fact-finding to determine Pierce’s ability to pay.**

In the event this court is inclined to impose appellate costs on Pierce should the State substantially prevail on appeal, he requests remand for a fair pre-imposition fact-finding hearing at which he can present evidence of his inability to pay. Consideration of ability to pay before imposition would at least ameliorate the substantial burden of

compounded interest. At any such hearing, this court should direct the superior court to appoint counsel for Pierce to assist him in developing a record and litigating his ability to pay.


If the State is able to overcome the presumption of continued indigence and support a finding that Pierce has the ability to pay, this court could then fairly exercise its discretion to impose all or a portion of the State's requested costs, depending on his actual and documented ability to pay.

C. CONCLUSION

This Court should decline to impose appellate costs should the State substantially prevail on appeal.

DATED September 2, 2016.

Respectfully submitted,



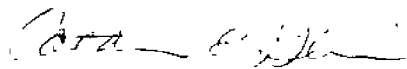
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Certification of Service by Mail

Today I mailed copies of the Supplemental Brief of Appellant and motion in *State v. Michael Pierce*, Cause No. 47011-0-II as follows:

Michael Pierce/DOC#750786
Washington State Penitentiary
1313 N. 13th Ave
Walla Walla, WA 99362

I certify under penalty of perjury of the laws of the State of Washington that the foregoing is true and correct.



Catherine E. Glinski
Done in Manchester, WA
September 2, 2016

GLINSKI LAW FIRM PLLC

September 02, 2016 - 11:28 AM

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