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STATE OF WASHINGTON  
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IN THE SUPREME COURT  
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

96443-2

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STATE OF WASHINGTON,  
Respondent,

v.

JAMES LOUTHAN,  
Petitioner.

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

Lewis County Cause No. 17-1-00403-5

The Honorable James W. Lawler, Judge

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PETITION FOR REVIEW

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... i**

**TABLE OF AUTHORITIES ..... iii**

**I. IDENTITY OF PETITIONER..... 1**

**II. COURT OF APPEALS DECISION ..... 1**

**III. ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW ..... 1**

**IV. STATEMENT OF THE CASE ..... 2**

**V. ARGUMENT WHY REVIEW SHOULD BE ACCEPTED..... 5**

The Supreme Court should accept review and hold that the search and seizure of Mr. Louthan violated Wash. Cont. art. I, § 7 because it was not justified by the community caretaking exception to the warrant requirement. This significant question of constitutional law is of substantial public interest and should be determined by the Supreme Court. RAP 13.4(b)(3) and (4). ..... 5

A. Mr. Louthan did not consent to a ride with the deputy; he was given no other choice. .... 6

B. The officers’ refusal to permit Mr. Louthan to leave cannot be justified under the “community caretaking” exception to the warrant requirement. .... 10

C. Even if Mr. Louthan was not unlawfully detained, the evidence must nonetheless be suppressed because the search of his pockets went beyond the scope of a protective weapons frisk..... 14

**VI. CONCLUSION.....16**

**Appendix: Court of Appeals Decision**

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

### FEDERAL CASES

<i>Brendlin v. California</i> , 551 U.S. 249, 127 S.Ct. 2400, 168 L.Ed.2d 132 (2007).....	8
<i>Cady v. Dombrowski</i> , 413 U.S. 433, 93 S.Ct. 2523, 37 L.Ed.2d 706 (1973) .....	11
<i>Florida v. Bostick</i> , 501 U.S. 429, 111 S.Ct. 2382, 115 L.Ed.2d 389 (1991) .....	7

### WASHINGTON STATE CASES

<i>State v. Acrey</i> , 148 Wn.2d 738, 64 P.3d 594 (2003).....	7, 9
<i>State v. Angelos</i> , 86 Wn. App. 253, 936 P.2d 52 (1997) .....	11
<i>State v. Barnes</i> , 96 Wn. App. 217, 978 P.2d 1131 (1999).....	8
<i>State v. DeArman</i> , 54 Wn. App. 621, 774 P.2d 1247 (1898).....	12
<i>State v. Flores</i> , 186 Wn.2d 506, 379 P.3d 104 (2016).....	5, 7
<i>State v. Gleason</i> , 70 Wn. App. 13, 851 P.2d 731 (1993).....	12
<i>State v. Harrington</i> , 167 Wn.2d 656, 222 P.3d 92 (2009).....	6, 8, 9, 13
<i>State v. Houser</i> , 95 Wn.2d 143, 622 P.2d 1218 (1980) .....	11
<i>State v. Hutchison</i> , 56 Wn. App. 863, 785 P.2d 1154 (1990).....	11
<i>State v. Kinzy</i> , 141 Wn.2d 373, 5 P.3d 668 (2000), <i>as corrected</i> (Aug. 22, 2000) .....	7, 11, 12, 13
<i>State v. Loewen</i> , 97 Wn.2d 562, 647 P.2d 489 (1982).....	11, 14, 15
<i>State v. Mendez</i> , 137 Wn.2d 208, 970 P.2d 722 (1999).....	7
<i>State v. Soto-Garcia</i> , 68 Wn. App. 20, 841 P.2d 1271 (1992) .....	13
<i>State v. Thorn</i> , 129 Wn.2d 347, 917 P.2d 108 (1996) .....	14

*State v. Villarreal*, 97 Wn. App. 636, 984 P.2d 1064 (1999) ..... 11

*State v. Wheeler*, 108 Wn.2d 230, 737 P.2d 1005 (1987)..... 14, 15

**CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS**

U.S. Const. Amend. IV ..... 5

U.S. Const. Amend. XIV ..... 5

Wash. Cont. art. I, § 7 ..... 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

**OTHER AUTHORITIES**

RAP 13.4..... 5, 16

**I. IDENTITY OF PETITIONER**

Petitioner James Louthan, the appellant below, asks the Court to review the decision of Division II of the Court of Appeals referred to in Section II below.

**II. COURT OF APPEALS DECISION**

James Louthan seeks review of the Court of Appeals unpublished opinion entered on September 18, 2018. A copy of the opinion is attached.

**III. ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW**

**ISSUE 1:** A person is seized by the police for constitutional purposes when a reasonable person in his/her situation would not have felt free to terminate the encounter and walk away. Was Mr. Louthan seized by the officers when they prohibited him from continuing to wait in the area where he was located, prohibited him from walking away, and prohibited him from knocking on the nearby door of an acquaintance; leaving him no option but to “accept a ride” from the officers?

**ISSUE 2:** A police officer may seize a person without a warrant under the “community caretaking” function when necessary to provide emergency aid or to conduct a health and safety check. Did the officers’ actions go beyond the permissible scope of the “community caretaking” function when they forced Mr. Louthan to accept a ride to a gas station when he did not appear to be in any kind of medical distress, said he was “fine,” and declined an offer for medical aid?

**ISSUE 3:** Before a police officer allows a person to enter his/her patrol car, the officer may conduct a protective frisk, limited in scope to searching for weapons. Did the deputy in Mr. Louthan's case go beyond the scope of a permissible weapons pat-down by reaching into Mr. Louthan's pocket and pulling out a work glove, which was found to contain a small amount of drugs?

#### **IV. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

James Louthan was walking around the Doty area of Lewis County in the early morning hours of a day in June. RP 4, 11. He had lost track of his best friend, who was from the area. RP 24. That friend was driving around the same area, looking for Mr. Louthan. RP 24. Neither of the men had cell phone service in the remote area, so they were having trouble contacting one another. RP 24.

Mr. Louthan's friend's sister owns the store in Doty. RP 24. His friend's mother lives next door to the store. RP 24. Mr. Louthan was debating whether he should wait longer for his friend to find him, wake up his friend's mother or sister, or walk back to where he had last seen his friend. RP 24-26. He smoked a cigarette and peeked into the windows of the Doty store. RP 7.

A resident of the area thought Mr. Louthan looked suspicious and called 911. RP 7. Two police officers – one sheriff's deputy and one state trooper -- responded and pulled up to where Mr. Louthan was standing. RP 4, 6.

Mr. Louthan explained to the officers what was going on. RP 11-12. The officers came to understand that he was not engaging in any criminal activity. RP 12. All of the officers' suspicions were dispelled. RP 12.

The conversation between Mr. Louthan and the officers turned to where Mr. Louthan was going to go. RP 12. The deputy used his phone to try to call Mr. Louthan's friend, but the call did not go through. RP 14.

Mr. Louthan asked the officers if they would allow him to knock on the door of his friend's mother or sister. RP 25. The officers told him that that "was not a good idea." RP 25.

The officers also told Mr. Louthan that it was "not a good idea" for him to stay in the area to wait for his friend. RP 15.

Mr. Louthan told the officers that, in that case, he wanted to just keep walking down the highway to try to find his friend. RP 26. The officers told him that "was not an option." RP 26.

The deputy then told Mr. Louthan that he would give him a ride to a gas station or other location, but that he would have to make sure Mr. Louthan did not have any weapons or drugs first. RP 16. But the deputy did not explicitly tell Mr. Louthan that he would be searched. RP 20.

Feeling he had no other choice, Mr. Louthan accepted a ride from the deputy. RP 26.



The deputy conducted a thorough search of Mr. Louthan, including the insides of his pockets. RP 8, 20. The deputy pulled a work glove out of Mr. Louthan's back pocket and discovered a small bag containing what appeared to be methamphetamine. RP 8, 20.

The officers arrested Mr. Louthan and the state charged him with possession of methamphetamine. CP 1-2. Mr. Louthan moved to suppress the drugs as the product of an unlawful search. CP 4.

At the suppression hearing, the officers testified that Mr. Louthan had told them that he was diabetic and had not eaten in a long time. RP 20. He also told them that he was cold. RP 20. They asked Mr. Louthan if he would like them to call and "aid car" because of his health issues but Mr. Louthan said that he was fine.<sup>1</sup> RP 14.

The officers admitted that they mentioned Mr. Louthan's active warrants while pressing him to accept a ride. RP 16, 22, 26. The officers testified that they never confirmed that the warrants were active and had no intention of arresting Mr. Louthan on those warrants. RP 8, 13, 17. But Mr. Louthan took the statements as a threat to arrest him if he did not accept the ride. RP 26-27.

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<sup>1</sup> The trooper's dashboard camera recorded almost the entire interaction, which was played at the suppression hearing. RP 4-5; Ex. 1. Accordingly, there was essentially no dispute at the hearing regarding what was actually said by each party. *See* RP 1-33 *generally*.

The court denied Mr. Louthan's motion to suppress the drugs. RP 41; CP 20-24.

The court found that Mr. Louthan consented to the search when he accepted the ride from the deputy. CP 22. The court also found that the officers did not permit Mr. Louthan to remain in the area, walk down the highway, or try to wake up his friend's family. CP 22.

The court found Mr. Louthan guilty of possession of methamphetamine at a stipulated facts trial. CP 17-19. Mr. Louthan timely appealed. CP 40. The Court of appeals affirmed his conviction. Opinion.

## **V. ARGUMENT WHY REVIEW SHOULD BE ACCEPTED**

The Supreme Court should accept review and hold that the search and seizure of Mr. Louthan violated Wash. Const. art. I, § 7 because it was not justified by the community caretaking exception to the warrant requirement. This significant question of constitutional law is of substantial public interest and should be determined by the Supreme Court. RAP 13.4(b)(3) and (4).

Both the U.S. and Washington Constitutions protect individuals against warrantless searches and seizures by the police. U.S. Const. Amends. IV, XIV; art. I, § 7.

It is "well established" that the Washington State Constitution provides greater protection against search and seizure than the Fourth Amendment. *State v. Flores*, 186 Wn.2d 506, 512, 379 P.3d 104 (2016).

Under art. I, § 7, there is “almost an absolute bar to warrantless seizures, with only limited, ‘jealously guarded exceptions.’” *Id.*

Whether a search or seizure violates the constitution is a question of law, reviewed *de novo*. *State v. Harrington*, 167 Wn.2d 656, 662, 222 P.3d 92 (2009).

If the police unconstitutionally seize an individual or conduct an unlawful search, any resulting evidence must be excluded at trial. *Id.* at 664.

A. Mr. Louthan did not consent to a ride with the deputy; he was given no other choice.

Once the officers’ suspicions about Mr. Louthan had been dispelled, he should have been free to go.

But the deputy did not let Mr. Louthan go. Instead, he told Mr. Louthan that he could not knock on his friend’s mother’s door, could not remain in the area, and could not walk away. RP 14-15, 25-26; CP 22.

At that point, Mr. Louthan was unlawfully seized. A reasonable person in his situation would not have felt free to go or to refuse the ride from the deputy. Indeed, he was given no choice but to get into the deputy’s car.

The deputy testified that his concerns that Mr. Louthan had been doing anything illegal had been alleviated by the time the conversation

turned to where Mr. Louthan was going to go next. RP 12. At that point, the officers' suspicions had been dispelled and Mr. Louthan had a constitutional right to knock on his friend's mother's or sister's door, to remain in the area and continue to wait for his friend to drive by, or to walk down the highway. But the deputy explicitly prohibited him from doing any of those things. RP 14-15, 25-26; CP 22.

A person is seized under the Fourth Amendment and art. I, § 7 of the Washington Constitution when a reasonable person in his/her situation would not have felt free to leave. *State v. Kinzy*, 141 Wn.2d 373, 388, 5 P.3d 668 (2000), *as corrected* (Aug. 22, 2000) (*citing Florida v. Bostick*, 501 U.S. 429, 436, 111 S.Ct. 2382, 115 L.Ed.2d 389 (1991)); *Flores*, 186 Wn.2d at 512.

Pursuant to a *Terry* stop, the police may briefly detain a person based upon reasonable suspicion that criminal activity is afoot. *State v. Acrey*, 148 Wn.2d 738, 747, 64 P.3d 594 (2003). Once that suspicion has been dispelled, however, there is no justification for further detention and the officer(s) must permit the person to walk away and terminate the encounter. *Id.*; *Kinzy*, 141 Wn.2d at 390.

When a person has a constitutional right to walk away, but is not permitted to do so by the police, s/he is seized for constitutional purposes. *State v. Mendez*, 137 Wn.2d 208, 222, 970 P.2d 722 (1999), *abrogated on*

*other grounds by Brendlin v. California*, 551 U.S. 249, 127 S.Ct. 2400, 168 L.Ed.2d 132 (2007) (a vehicle passenger was seized under art. I, § 7 when, as he attempted to walk away, an officer told him to get back into the car).

A person is can also be seized when the police merely ask him/her to wait. *State v. Barnes*, 96 Wn. App. 217, 223, 978 P.2d 1131 (1999) (pedestrian was seized when an officer approached him and asked him to wait while the officer ran a warrant check).

The presence of a second officer at the scene is another consideration that can serve to escalate police contact into a seizure. *Harrington*, 167 Wn.2d at 666.

The question of whether a reasonable person would have felt free to terminate an encounter with the police is analyzed in light of all of the objective circumstances. *Barnes*, 96 Wn. App. at 223.

Here, the officers seized Mr. Louthan when they gave him no option but to accept their “offer” of a “ride” in the patrol car. A reasonable person in Mr. Louthan’s situation, given the totality of the circumstances, would not have felt free to walk away. Indeed, the deputy explicitly told Mr. Louthan that walking away was “not an option.” RP 26; CP 22.

Even so, the Court of Appeals concludes that Mr. Louthan was not seized. Opinion, p. 10. But the Court does not clarify how Mr. Louthan could possibly have ended the interaction without walking away. *See* Opinion. The Court of Appeals' reasoning is unavailing.

By the deputy's own admission, there was no longer any suspicion that Mr. Louthan was engaging in illegal behavior by the time the issue of a "ride" came up. RP 12. Accordingly, the officers did not have legal authority to seize Mr. Louthan and did so in violation of his constitutional rights. *Acrey*, 148 Wn.2d at 747.

The officers seized Mr. Louthan in violation of his rights under the Fourth Amendment and art. I, § 7. The drugs found pursuant to that unconstitutional seizure should have been suppressed. *Harrington*, 167 Wn.2d at 662. The trial court's suppression ruling must be reversed.

Nor can the officers' refusal to permit Mr. Louthan to leave be justified under the "community caretaking" exception to the warrant requirement.

B. The officers' refusal to permit Mr. Louthan to leave cannot be justified under the "community caretaking" exception to the warrant requirement.

During their conversation, Mr. Louthan told the officers that he was diabetic and that he had not eaten in a long time or taken his insulin.<sup>2</sup> RP 20. When the officers asked Mr. Louthan if he needed an "aid car," however, he declined their offer. RP 14. There was no indication that Mr. Louthan was exhibiting any signs of physical distress or that he was experiencing some kind of medical emergency. *See* RP 4-32 *generally*.

At the suppression hearing, prosecutor relied, in part, on the idea that the officers had been exercising their "community caretaking" function in their interaction with Mr. Louthan, in order to prevent a medical emergency. RP 32.

But there was no medical emergency. And while the officers may have been entitled to check on Mr. Louthan's wellbeing, they did not have the authority to force him to accept a ride to a gas station after he declined medical aid. Indeed, a ride to a gas station hardly qualifies as rendering emergency aid, even if such aid had been necessary. The officers' actions cannot be justified under the "community caretaking" exception to the warrant requirement.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the interaction occurred in June, Mr. Louthan also mentioned to the officers that he was cold. RP 4, 20.

The warrant requirement for searches and seizures does not apply when the police are operating under their “community caretaking” function, rather than investigating a crime. *Kinzy*, 141 Wn.2d at 385. The exception was originally announced in the context of police investigation and aid-rendering in after a car accident. *Id.* (citing *Cady v. Dombrowski*, 413 U.S. 433, 441, 454, 93 S.Ct. 2523, 37 L.Ed.2d 706 (1973); *State v. Houser*, 95 Wn.2d 143, 622 P.2d 1218 (1980)).

Subsequent cases have expanded the “community caretaking” police function to situations requiring other types emergency aid or checks on health and safety. *Kinzy*, 141 Wn.2d at 386–87 (citing *State v. Villarreal*, 97 Wn. App. 636, 984 P.2d 1064 (1999); *State v. Angelos*, 86 Wn. App. 253, 936 P.2d 52 (1997); *State v. Hutchison*, 56 Wn. App. 863, 785 P.2d 1154 (1990); *State v. Loewen*, 97 Wn.2d 562, 647 P.2d 489 (1982)).

In situations involving emergency aid, the police must actually be required to render such aid. *Id.* Emergency aid situations permit greater intrusion than routine health and safety checks, but also require greater urgency. *Id.* The emergency aid exception only applies if (1) the officer subjectively believed the person needed assistance for health or safety reasons; (2) a reasonable person in the same situation would have had the



same belief; and (3) “there was a reasonable basis to associate the need for assistance with the place to be searched.” *Id.*

Appellate courts must apply the “community caretaking” exception cautiously “because of a real risk of abuse in allowing even well-intentioned stops to assist.” *Id.* at 388 (citing *State v. DeArman*, 54 Wn. App. 621, 626, 774 P.2d 1247 (1898); *State v. Gleason*, 70 Wn. App. 13, 17-18, 851 P.2d 731 (1993)). The officer’s investigation into a person’s need for assistance may only continue until the concerns regarding health and safety have been dispelled. *Id.*

The officers’ seizure and subsequent search of Mr. Louthan cannot be justified as either a health and safety check or as emergency aid.

If the purpose of the contact was a health and safety check, that purpose dissipated once Mr. Louthan told the deputy that he was “fine” and did not need them to call for medical assistance. RP 14. Once Mr. Louthan gave that response, the “check” was complete and the police should have permitted him to terminate the encounter. *Kinzy*, 141 Wn.2d at 388.

Likewise, the seizure cannot be justified under the emergency aid exception because there was no emergency and the officers did not render any aid. First, the officers did not subjectively believe that Mr. Louthan required emergency aid. *Id.* at 386-87. If they had, they would have

called for some kind of medical assistance, rather than offering to drive him to a gas station. Second, a reasonable person in the officers' situation would not have believed that Mr. Louthan needed emergency aid after he said that he was fine and declined the offer for an "aid car." *Id.* Finally, even if the officers had believed that Mr. Louthan needed help, requiring him to take a ride to a gas station and surrender to a full search of his pockets had no reasonable connection to any perceived medical emergency. *Id.*

The factors for determining whether the emergency aid exception applied to Mr. Louthan's case all weigh against the constitutionality of his seizure and subsequent search. *Id.* Indeed, the officers did not actually provide him with any emergency assistance – they merely forced him to take a ride to a gas station. The officers' actions do not fall under the emergency aid exception to the warrant requirement. The officers unconstitutionally seized Mr. Louthan when they prohibited him from ending their encounter and gave him no choice but to ride in their patrol car to a gas station. *Kinzy*, 141 Wn.2d at 386–87.

The trial court erred by failing to suppress the drugs that were obtained through exploitation of Mr. Louthan's unconstitutional seizure. *Harrington*, 167 Wn.2d at 669 (citing *State v. Soto-Garcia*, 68 Wn. App. 20, 841 P.2d 1271 (1992), *abrogated on other grounds by State v. Thorn*,

129 Wn.2d 347, 917 P.2d 108 (1996)). The trial court’s suppression ruling must be reversed. *Id.*

C. Even if Mr. Louthan was not unlawfully detained, the evidence must nonetheless be suppressed because the search of his pockets went beyond the scope of a protective weapons frisk.

Even if this court finds that Mr. Louthan was not unlawfully detained, the search of his pockets still violated his constitutional rights because it went beyond the scope of a protective weapons frisk.

When the police accept a community member into a patrol car – either as part of rendering emergency aid or in the process of conducting a criminal investigation – they may first conduct a frisk to ensure that s/he does not possess any weapons. *Loewen*, 97 Wn.2d at 566; *State v. Wheeler*, 108 Wn.2d 230, 235–36, 737 P.2d 1005 (1987). But the officers violate the state and federal constitutions by conducting a search beyond that which is “reasonably designed to discover guns, knives, clubs or other hidden instruments for the assault of the police officer.” *Loewen*, 97 Wn.2d at 566.

In *Loewen*, for example, a police officer drove a car accident victim to the hospital in his patrol car. *Id.* First, however, he conducted a pat-down search of her person. *Id.* During that search, the officer felt an object in her pocket that was too small to be a weapon, pulled it out, and discovered it to be drug paraphernalia. *Id.* The Supreme Court ruled that

the drug paraphernalia should have been suppressed because the search of the woman went beyond the scope of the weapons frisk necessary to protect the officers while transporting the woman to the hospital. *Id.* at 492-93.

Indeed, in *Wheeler*, the Supreme Court held that the police were justified in conducting only a weapons pat-down search when transporting a criminal suspect (who had not yet been arrested) in their patrol car. *Wheeler*, 108 Wn.2d at 235-36.

Similarly, here, the police may have been justified in patting Mr. Louthan down to ensure that he was not carrying a weapon before allowing him into the patrol car. But the search went far beyond the scope of a weapons frisk. Instead, the officers reached into Mr. Louthan's pocket and pulled out a work glove before they found any contraband. RP 8; CP 23.

In the alternative, if this Court finds that Mr. Louthan was not unconstitutionally seized, the drug evidence must nonetheless be suppressed because the deputy's search of Mr. Louthan's pockets went beyond the scope of the weapons pat-down that would have been permissible as a condition of giving Mr. Louthan a ride to a gas station. *Loewen*, 97 Wn.2d at 566; *Wheeler*, 108 Wn.2d at 235-36. The trial

court's order denying Mr. Louthan's motion to suppress must be reversed.

*Id.*

**VI. CONCLUSION**

The issues here are significant under the State Constitution. Furthermore, because they could impact a large number of criminal cases, they are of substantial public interest. The Supreme Court should accept review pursuant to RAP 13.4(b)(3) and (4).

Respectfully submitted October 17, 2018.



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Skylar T. Brett, WSBA No. 45475  
Attorney for Appellant/Petitioner

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that I mailed a copy of the Petition for Review,  
postage pre-paid, to:

James Louthan  
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through the Court's online filing system, with the permission of the  
recipient(s).

In addition, I electronically filed the original with the Court of  
Appeals.

I CERTIFY UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY UNDER THE  
LAWS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON THAT THE  
FOREGOING IS TRUE AND CORRECT.

Signed at Seattle, Washington on October 17, 2018.



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Skylar T. Brett, WSBA No. 45475  
Attorney for Appellant/Petitioner

**APPENDIX:**

September 18, 2018

**IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON**

**DIVISION II**

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

No. 50674-2-II

Respondent,

v.

JAMES LAURENCE LOUTHAN,

UNPUBLISHED OPINION

Appellant.

WORSWICK, J. — James Louthan appeals from his unlawful possession of a controlled substance conviction, contending that the trial court erred by failing to suppress evidence seized during what Louthan asserts was an illegal search of his person. Because Louthan cannot meet his burden of showing that he had been seized prior to his arrest and because substantial evidence supports the trial court’s finding that Louthan had consented to a search of his person, his contention fails, and we affirm his conviction.

**FACTS**

On June 20, 2017, the State charged Louthan with unlawful possession of a controlled substance. Before trial, Louthan moved to suppress evidence that had been seized from his person. The trial court held a CrR 3.6 hearing to address Louthan’s suppression motion, at which Lewis County Sheriff’s Deputy Stephen Heller and Louthan testified.

At the suppression hearing, Deputy Heller testified that he and Trooper Torson Iverson went to a store in Doty, Washington at approximately 3:00 a.m. on June 19, 2017, in response to a report of a man wearing a camouflage jacket staring toward the reporting party’s home and



looking in the doors and windows of the closed store. Heller contacted Louthan outside the store as Iverson arrived. Iverson's dashboard camera recorded the officers' interaction with Louthan. The recording was played at Louthan's suppression hearing.

The video recording shows Louthan telling the officers that he got separated from a friend who was from the area and that he had not been able to contact his friend due to a lack of cellular phone service. Louthan also told the officers that he was a type 1 diabetic, did not have any insulin, and needed food. Louthan confirmed with Iverson that he had been walking down the highway. When Iverson told Louthan that the police had received a call stating that he had been walking down the center line of the highway, Louthan responded, "Yeah, right I mean I've been diabetic for thirty-five years, so my vision at night time is not worth a [expletive]." Ex. 1, at 2 min., 36 sec. through 2 min., 41 sec. Louthan also told Iverson that it was "freezing" out. Ex. 1, at 2 min., 41 sec. Iverson asked Louthan if he had a light; Louthan told Iverson that he had a light on his phone but that his phone battery was nearly dead.

Heller also testified at the suppression hearing that he ran a warrants check on Louthan while Louthan was speaking with Iverson. Heller found that Louthan had outstanding warrants but decided that he would not arrest Louthan based on those warrants. Heller further testified at the hearing that at this point in the interaction, he no longer had a suspicion that Louthan had been engaged in criminal activity and that the investigative portion of his stop had been completed. Heller stated that he continued interacting with Louthan to assist him in figuring out where to go that early in the morning.

The video exhibit shows Heller telling Louthan about the outstanding warrants and advising him to take care of the warrants. Heller then tries to call Louthan's friend, but no one

answers. Heller asked Louthan, “So, what’s the plan here man? Do you need medical attention for your diabetes because you haven’t eaten anything and your blood sugar is going to be [inaudible]?” Ex. 1, at 7 min., 26 sec. through 7 min., 33 sec. Louthan stated that he was “fine right now” but “I can’t stand out here in the cold, I’m freezing man.” Ex. 1, at 7 min., 43 sec. through 7 min., 47 sec. Louthan stated that he would try to wake up his friend’s relatives to use their phone. Heller said that was not a good idea and that it was not a good idea to hang around there. Louthan stated that he would start walking down the highway then, to which Heller responded that he didn’t want him walking down the highway. Heller then told Louthan:

So what I’m going to do is I’m going to give you the option. I already know you got warrants. You got to get them taken care of, okay? I’m willing to give you a ride into Chehalis, alright? And I think you’re willing. I’m willing to do that. I have to go that way anyway. But you got to listen to my [expletive] music, you got to wear a seatbelt, and I got to make sure you don’t have any dope, and any weapons, or anything on you.

Ex. 1, at 8 min., 10 sec. through 8 min., 27 sec. Heller asked Louthan if his proposal sounded good, and Louthan said, “Yeah.” Ex. 1, at 8 min., 31 sec. Louthan then asked Heller if he could call for another ride to come get him. Heller asked Louthan if there was someone else who could come get him. Louthan did not provide the name of another person, and Heller suggested that Louthan could try calling someone else after they arrived in Chehalis. Heller told Louthan that he was not going to confirm the warrants and that he was not taking him to jail. Iverson advised Louthan that if he was in Chehalis and his blood sugar kept going down, someone there could call for help. Heller again asked Louthan if the proposal sounded good, and Louthan again said, “Yeah.” Ex. 1, at 9 min., 22 sec. Heller then searched Louthan and found a clear plastic bag containing suspected methamphetamines, which was located in a work glove in Louthan’s back left pocket.

Louthan testified at the suppression hearing that his friend's sister owned the Doty store where he had been confronted by police and that his friend's mother lived next door to the store. Louthan stated that he was waiting for his friend to come find him at the store when the police officers arrived. Louthan further stated that he felt that Heller was not providing him with a real choice as to whether he could accept a ride to Chehalis because he believed Heller was not permitting him to either wake up his friend's relatives or to walk down the highway. Louthan also stated that he felt Heller had mentioned the warrants to coerce him to accept the offer of a ride to Chehalis.

The trial court denied Louthan's suppression motion and entered the following findings of fact and conclusions of law in support of its ruling:

#### **FINDINGS OF FACT**

- 1.1 On June 19, 2017, Deputy Stephen Heller with the Lewis County Sheriff's Office responded to a location on Stevens Road in Doty at approximately 2:57 am for a suspicious person call to 911.
- 1.2 The named complainant reported that there was an unknown male standing under a street light, smoking a cigarette, staring at her house.
- 1.3 The male was also observed by the complainant looking through the windows of a closed business he was standing next to.
- 1.4 Law enforcement was also informed that a male had been seen in the area walking down the middle of the road.
- 1.5 Upon contact with the male, Dep. Heller was assisted by Trooper Torson Iverson.
- 1.6 Neither law enforcement officer used or displayed any aggressive action or words towards the male during their contact.
- 1.7 Up to the point of Louthan's arrest, he was never in custody.

- 1.8 The male indicated that he was from Oakville, and was in the Doty area hiking, but had become separated from his friend.
- 1.9 The male also stated he had been walking down the middle of the road.
- 1.10 The male had attempted to call his friend but his cellphone was not working in that area and the battery was dying.
- 1.11 Dep. Heller obtained the phone number for the friend the male was attempting to call and called the number on his cellphone.
- 1.12 Nobody answered the phone call from Dep. Heller.
- 1.13 The male advised that he was a type 1 diabetic and had not eaten for several hours.
- 1.14 The male refused the summoning of medical assistance offered by Dep. Heller.
- 1.15. The male was verbally identified as James Louthan.
- 1.16 Louthan had active warrants from Grays Harbor County and Mason County, which were not confirmed and Louthan was never detained on.
- 1.17 When asked his plan, Louthan said that he wanted to wake up a person he knew that lived at the location where he was contacted and was told “no” by Dep. Heller.
- 1.18 After Louthan was told “no”, he said “well, I’m going to walk down the highway,” and was told “no” by Dep. Heller.
- 1.19 Dep. Heller offered to give Louthan a ride to Chehalis in his patrol vehicle so Louthan would have an easier time contacting someone he knew, because the temperature at the time was cold, because of Louthan’s medical issues, and because of the reports of activity attributed to Louthan.
- 1.20 Dep. Heller advised Louthan that him remaining in the area was not a valid option.
- 1.21 Dep. Heller indicated through testimony that the purpose for him making this comment was due to the totality of the circumstances at the time.
- 1.22 Louthan had no other person to obtain a ride from other than Dep. Heller.

- 1.23 Dep. Heller advised Louthan that he was not going to book him on the warrants or even confirm them.
- 1.24 Dep. Heller testified that no reasonable suspicion of criminal activity existed on the part of Louthan.
- 1.25 Louthan decided to accept the offer from Dep. Heller for a ride into Chehalis.
- 1.26 As a condition of getting a ride to Chehalis in his vehicle, Dep. Heller advised Louthan that he would have to be searched for drugs and/or weapons.
- 1.27 Louthan consented to the search of his person before entering the vehicle.
- 1.28 During this search, Dep. Heller discovered a glove in Louthan's back pants pocket that contained a plastic baggie with a white, crystalline substance.
- 1.29 This substance was recognized as methamphetamine by Dep. Heller through his training and experience.
- 1.30 Louthan was placed under arrest for possession of a controlled substance.
- 1.31 Dep. Heller advised Louthan of his Miranda warnings from his standard issued card immediately after placing Louthan under arrest.
- 1.32 After advisement, Louthan stated that he had forgotten the methamphetamine was in his pants pocket.

### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW (3.6)**

- 2.1 Under the totality of the circumstances, Dep. Heller's actions with Louthan were a reasonable application of the community caretaking function of law enforcement up to the point Louthan consented to be searched.
- 2.2 The consent given by Louthan as a condition of getting a ride was valid.
- 2.3 Dep. Heller was allowed to require Louthan to be searched as a condition of giving him a ride in his patrol vehicle.

Clerk's Papers (CP) at 20-23.

Following the trial court's denial of his suppression motion, Louthan waived his jury trial right. The matter proceeded to a bench trial on stipulated facts, after which the trial court found Louthan guilty of unlawful possession of a controlled substance. Louthan appeals.

### ANALYSIS

Louthan contends that the trial court erred in denying his motion to suppress evidence because the evidence seized by law enforcement officers was found during an illegal detention and search of his person. Alternatively, Louthan contends that even if he was lawfully detained, the trial court erred by not suppressing the evidence as beyond the scope of a protective weapons frisk. Because Louthan has not met his burden of proving that he was seized prior to his arrest and because substantial evidence supports the trial court's finding that Louthan had consented to a search of his person for drugs or weapons as a condition of receiving a ride from Deputy Heller, his contentions fail and we affirm his conviction.

#### I. STANDARD OF REVIEW

We review a trial court's ruling on a motion to suppress evidence to determine (1) whether substantial evidence supports the trial court's challenged findings of fact and, if so, (2) whether the findings support the trial court's conclusions of law. *State v. Garvin*, 166 Wn.2d 242, 249, 207 P.3d 1266 (2009). "Evidence is substantial when it is enough 'to persuade a fair-minded person of the truth of the stated premise.'" *Garvin*, 166 Wn.2d at 249 (quoting *State v. Reid*, 98 Wn. App. 152, 156, 988 P.2d 1038 (1999)). Unchallenged findings are verities on appeal. *State v. Gaines*, 154 Wn.2d 711, 716, 116 P.3d 993 (2005). We review conclusions of law de novo. *Garvin*, 166 Wn.2d at 249.

## II. CHALLENGED FINDINGS OF FACT

Louthan assigns error to the trial court’s findings of fact 1.7, 1.19, 1.21, 1.22, 1.25, 1.26, and 1.27. But Louthan does not directly address these findings in the argument section of his brief or explain how they lack substantial evidence in support. Of these findings, only two are fairly implicated by Louthan’s legal arguments, 1.7 and 1.27. Accordingly, we treat the remaining findings as verities on appeal.<sup>1</sup> *In re Det. of Belcher*, 196 Wn. App. 592, 600 n.1, 385 P.3d 174 (2016) (citing *State v. Bonds*, 174 Wn. App. 553, 562, 299 P.3d 663 (2013)), *aff’d* 189 Wn.2d 280, 399 P.3d 1179 (2017).

### A. *Finding of Fact 1.7*

Finding of fact 1.7 states, “Up to the point of Louthan’s arrest, he was never in custody.” CP at 21. Although Louthan does not directly address this finding, he argues that he was unlawfully seized at the point of the police encounter when the officers’ suspicions of criminal activity were dispelled but the officers did not allow him to knock on his friend’s relatives’ door, remain in the area, or walk down the highway. We disagree.

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, substantial evidence supports findings of fact 1.19, 1.21, 1.22, 1.25, and 1.26. Findings 1.19 and 1.21 are supported by Heller’s testimony as to his reasons for offering Louthan a ride to Chehalis and for advising Louthan that his remaining in the area was not a valid option. Finding 1.22 is clearly supported by the video exhibit showing Heller unsuccessfully attempting to contact Louthan’s friend and showing Heller ask Louthan if there was anyone else that could pick him up, to which Louthan did not provide any names. Finding 1.25 is also clearly supported by the video exhibit as it shows Louthan accepting Heller’s offer of a ride to Chehalis. Whether Louthan’s acceptance was voluntary under the circumstances is a separate question properly addressed through his challenge to finding 1.27 and conclusions of law 2.2 and 2.3. The video exhibit also shows Heller advising Louthan that he would be searched for drugs or weapons as a condition of accepting a ride to Chehalis and, thus, supports finding 1.26.

Although denoted as a finding of fact, the determination of whether a seizure had occurred is a mixed question of law and fact. *State v. Harrington*, 167 Wn.2d 656, 662, 222 P.3d 92 (2009). We give great deference to the trial court’s resolution of differing accounts of the police encounter but review de novo whether those facts constitute a seizure. *Harrington*, 167 Wn.2d at 662.

The Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution and article I, section 7 of the Washington Constitution protect an individual’s right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures. *State v. Fortun-Cebada*, 158 Wn. App. 158, 168, 241 P.3d 800 (2010). “[A]rticle I, section 7 of the Washington Constitution provides greater protection to individual privacy rights than the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution.” *State v. Rankin*, 151 Wn.2d 689, 694, 92 P.3d 202 (2004) (quoting *State v. Jones*, 146 Wn.2d 328, 332, 45 P.3d 1062 (2002)). However, when determining whether a seizure had occurred under article I, section 7 of our State Constitution, Washington courts apply the test set forth in *United States v. Mendenhall*, 446 U.S. 544, 100 S. Ct. 1870, 64 L. Ed. 2d 497 (1980). *State v. Young*, 135 Wn.2d 498, 509-10, 957 P.2d 681 (1998); *see also Rankin*, 151 Wn.2d at 695; *State v. O’Neill*, 148 Wn.2d 564, 574, 62 P.3d 489 (2003).

Under the *Mendenhall* test for determining whether a seizure occurred, “[N]ot every encounter between a police officer and a citizen is an intrusion requiring an objective justification.” *Rankin*, 151 Wn.2d at 695 (quoting *Mendenhall*, 446 U.S. at 553). Rather, a seizure occurs under article 1, section 7 only when “considering all the circumstances, an individual’s freedom of movement is restrained and the individual would not believe he or she is free to leave or decline a request due to an officer’s use of force or display of authority.” *Rankin*,



No. 50674-2-II

151 Wn.2d at 695. This determination is made objectively by looking at the officer's actions. *Rankin*, 151 Wn.2d at 695.

Police actions that may amount to a seizure include, “the threatening presence of several officers, the display of a weapon by an officer, some physical touching of the person of the citizen, or the use of language or tone of voice indicating that compliance with the officer's request might be compelled.” *Young*, 135 Wn.2d at 512 (quoting *Mendenhall*, 446 U.S. at 554-55). A criminal defendant “bears the burden to prove a seizure occurred in violation of [his or] her constitutional rights.” *State v. Young*, 167 Wn. App. 922, 929, 275 P.3d 1150 (2012).

Although it is uncontested that neither of the responding officers “used or displayed any aggressive action or words towards [Louthan] during their contact,” Louthan asserts that he was seized when the officers presented him with no other option than to accept the offer of a ride to Chehalis. CP at 21. We disagree. Even assuming that the officers' disapproval of Louthan's stated plans to knock on a person's door at 3:00 a.m. in the morning or to walk down the highway limited his options for leaving the area, a reasonable person in Louthan's situation would nonetheless feel free to decline the officer's offer of a ride or otherwise terminate the encounter.

The ‘free to leave’ test for determining when an individual is in custody is not automatically satisfied when a person is not physically able to leave an area in which he or she is contacted by police. *See, e.g., Florida v. Bostick*, 501 U.S. 429, 436, 111 S. Ct. 2382, 115 L. Ed. 2d 389 (1991). Rather, the crucial test is whether a reasonable person would feel free to decline an officer's request or otherwise terminate the encounter. *Bostick*, 501 U.S. at 436; *State v. Kinzy*, 141 Wn.2d 373, 388, 5 P.3d 668 (2000). “Whether there was any show of authority on

the officer's part, and the extent of any such showing, are crucial factual questions in assessing whether a seizure occurred." *O'Neill*, 148 Wn.2d at 577. And "no seizure occurs where an officer approaches an individual in public and requests to talk to him or her, engages in conversation, or requests identification, so long as the person involved need not answer and may walk away." *State v. Cormier*, 100 Wn. App. 457, 461, 997 P.2d 950 (2000).

Here, after Deputy Heller's suspicions of criminal activity had been dispelled, he first attempted to assist Louthan by calling a number for Louthan's friend. After that attempt was unsuccessful, Heller asked Louthan what his plan was and whether he needed medical assistance due to his diabetes and lack of food. Louthan responded that he was "fine right now," but further stated, "I can't stand out here in the cold, I'm freezing man." Ex. 1, at 7 min., 43 sec. through 7 min., 47 sec. After Heller stated his disapproval of Louthan's plan to either knock on his friend's relative's door to use the phone or to walk down the highway, Heller presented Louthan with the offer of a ride to Chehalis on the condition that Heller first check that Louthan had no drugs or weapons on him. Louthan agreed to the offer but then asked whether someone else could provide him a ride. Heller asked Louthan if there was someone else who could provide him a ride, but Louthan did not provide any names. Heller again offered Louthan a ride to Chehalis and Louthan again agreed.

The police conduct under these circumstances, when viewed objectively, would not lead a reasonable person to believe that they could not terminate this encounter. Heller and Torson did not display any aggressive action toward Louthan during the interaction. And notably, Heller's offer to Louthan of a ride to Chehalis was neither a command nor a request. Instead, it was merely a proposal to which any reasonable person in Louthan's position could freely

decline. Because a reasonable person would feel free to terminate the police encounter and decline Heller's conditional offer of a ride, Louthan's challenge to finding of fact 1.7 fails.

B. *Finding of Fact 1.27*<sup>2</sup>

Finding of Fact 1.27 states, "Louthan consented to the search of his person before entering the vehicle." CP at 22. Substantial evidence supports this finding.

"Whether consent was voluntary or instead the product of duress or coercion, express or implied, is a question of fact to be determined from the totality of the circumstances." *O'Neill*, 148 Wn.2d at 588. Factors that may be relevant to a finding of voluntariness are (1) whether police provided *Miranda*<sup>3</sup> warnings before obtaining consent, (2) the degree of education and intelligence of the consenting person, and (3) whether the police advised the consenting person of his or her right to refuse consent. *State v. Reichenbach*, 153 Wn.2d 126, 132, 101 P.3d 80 (2004). These factors, however, are not helpful here. First, no *Miranda* warnings were given, but none were required. Second, the record does not disclose Louthan's level of intelligence or degree of education. Finally where, as here, a subject is not in custody, knowledge of the right to refuse consent is not a prerequisite to finding that the subject's consent was voluntarily given. *O'Neill*, 148 Wn.2d at 588.

Other factors that may be relevant to a voluntariness finding are (1) whether the consenting person was restrained, (2) whether police had to repeatedly request consent before it

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<sup>2</sup> Louthan does not discuss his consent to search or the voluntariness of such consent. Instead, he appears to argue that the search was the product of an illegal seizure, which argument we reject above. Because no seizure occurred prior to Louthan's arrest, we do not discuss the community caretaking exception to the warrant requirement.

<sup>3</sup> *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436, 86 S. Ct. 1602, 16 L. Ed. 2d 694 (1966).

was given, and (3) whether the consenting person was cooperative or had refused consent before providing consent. *State v. Dancer*, 174 Wn. App. 666, 676, 300 P.3d 475 (2013). Here, Louthan was not restrained when he twice responded affirmatively to Heller's offer of a ride to Chehalis on the condition that Heller first check that he did not possess any drugs or weapons. As noted above, it is uncontested that neither of the responding officers acted aggressively in their interactions with Louthan. And there is nothing in the record suggesting that Louthan's consent was the product of coercion or duress. Accordingly, substantial evidence supports the trial court's finding that, under a totality of the circumstances, Louthan had voluntarily consented to a search of his person for drugs or weapons.

### III. SUPPRESSION RULING

Having determined that substantial evidence supports the trial court's challenged findings of fact, we turn to whether the findings support the challenged conclusions of law. Louthan assigns error to the trial court's conclusions of law 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

Conclusion of law 2.1 states, "Under the totality of the circumstances, Dep. Heller's actions with Louthan were a reasonable application of the community caretaking function of law enforcement up to the point Louthan consented to be searched." CP at 23. Regarding this conclusion, Louthan argues that his seizure was not justified under the officers' community caretaking function because he had declined the officer's offer to summon aid and because he did not otherwise exhibit any signs of physical distress requiring emergency treatment. But, having determined above that Louthan has not met his burden of showing he was seized prior to his arrest, we need not address Louthan's argument regarding the reasonableness of the officers' conduct under their community caretaking function.

Next, conclusion of law 2.2 states, “The consent given by Louthan as a condition of getting a ride was valid.” CP at 23. Although Louthan assigns error to this conclusion of law, he does not address it in his brief. To the extent that Louthan is challenging the voluntariness of his consent to search his person, we have addressed the challenge in our review of the trial court’s finding of fact 1.27 and held that substantial evidence supports the finding. Accordingly, we do not further address the issue.

Finally, conclusion of law 2.3 states, “Dep. Heller was allowed to require Louthan to be searched as a condition of giving him a ride in his patrol vehicle.” CP at 23. Regarding this conclusion, Louthan argues only that Heller’s search of his pockets went beyond the permissible scope of a protective weapons frisk. This argument ignores that Louthan had consented to Heller searching him for weapons or drugs as a condition of receiving a ride to Chehalis in Heller’s patrol vehicle. Accordingly, Louthan’s reliance on cases discussing the permissible “scope of a protective weapons search” in the context of an investigative *Terry*<sup>4</sup> stop or medical emergency are unavailing. Br. of Appellant at 14 (citing *State v. Wheeler*, 108 Wn.2d 230, 737 P.2d 1005 (1987); *State v. Loewen*, 97 Wn.2d 562, 647 P.2d 489 (1982)).

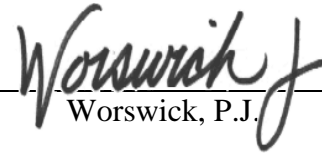
Because Louthan has not met his burden of proving that officers had seized him prior to his arrest and because substantial evidence supports the trial court’s finding that he voluntarily consented to Heller’s search for weapons and drugs as a condition of receiving a ride to Chehalis, we affirm the trial court’s order denying Louthan’s motion to suppress.

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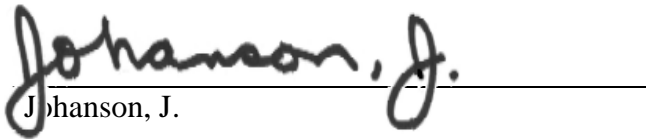
<sup>4</sup> *Terry v. Ohio*, 392 U.S. 1, 88 S. Ct 1868, 20 L. Ed. 2d 889 (1968).

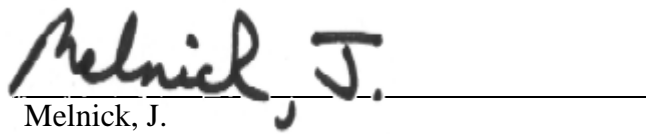
No. 50674-2-II

A majority of the panel having determined that this opinion will not be printed in the Washington Appellate Reports, but will be filed for public record in accordance with RCW 2.06.040, it is so ordered.

  
Worswick, P.J.

We concur:

  
Johanson, J.

  
Melnick, J.

**LAW OFFICE OF SKYLAR BRETT**

**October 17, 2018 - 2:45 PM**

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**Appellate Court Case Title:** State of Washington, Respondent v. James L. Louthan, Appellant  
**Superior Court Case Number:** 17-1-00403-5

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