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Court of Appeals
Division III
State of Washington

No. 32811-2-III
IN THE COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON
DIVISION III

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Plaintiff/Respondent,

vs.

JASON D. FLETT,

Defendant/Appellant.

Appellant's Brief

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A. ASSIGNMENTS OF ERROR

1. The trial court erred in instructing the jury on the aggravating circumstance of deliberate cruelty.

2. The evidence was insufficient to support the aggravating circumstance of deliberate cruelty.

3. The trial court erred in imposing an exceptional sentence.

4. The record does not support the finding Mr. Flett has the current or future ability to pay the imposed legal financial obligations.

5. The trial court erred when it ordered Mr. Flett to pay a \$100 DNA-collection fee.

B. ISSUES PERTAINING TO ASSIGNMENTS OF ERROR

1. Was Mr. Flett's right to due process under Washington Constitution, Article 1, § 3 and United States Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment violated where the State failed to prove the aggravating circumstance of deliberate cruelty?

2. Since the directive to pay LFO's was based on an unsupported finding of ability to pay, should the matter be remanded for the sentencing court to make individualized inquiry into the defendant's current and future ability to pay before imposing LFOs?

3. Does the mandatory \$100 DNA-collection fee authorized under RCW 43.43.7541 violate substantive due process when applied to defendants who do not have the ability or likely future ability to pay the fine?

4. Does the mandatory \$100 DNA-collection fee authorized under RCW 43.43.7541 violate equal protection when applied to defendants who have previously provided a sample and paid the \$100 DNA-collection fee?

5. If the Washington state patrol crime laboratory already has a DNA sample from an individual for a qualifying offense, does the trial court abuse its discretion when it orders a defendant to submit to yet another DNA collection?

C. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Jason Flett was convicted of first degree murder with the aggravating circumstance of deliberate cruelty. CP 54-57. The State presented evidence he decided to kill the victim, drove her to an isolated location and proceeded to strangle, stab and beat her with a shovel until she was dead. RP 112-13, 120-29. The jury was instructed on the aggravating circumstance of deliberate cruelty over Mr. Flett's objection for insufficient evidence to support the instruction. RP 410-11, 425.

At sentencing the Court imposed an exceptional sentence based on the jury's special verdict finding the aggravating circumstance of deliberate cruelty. CP 57, 81. Mr. Flett had seven prior felony convictions dated 2002 or later. CP 80-81. The Court imposed restitution of \$5750 and mandatory costs of \$800¹, for a total Legal Financial Obligation (LFO) of \$6550. CP 85-86. The Judgment and Sentence contained the following language:

¶ 2.5 Financial Ability. The court has considered the total amount owing, the defendant's past, present and future ability to pay legal financial obligations including the defendant's financial resources and the likelihood that the defendant's status will change.

CP 82.

The Court did not inquire into Mr. Flett's financial resources or consider the burden payment of LFOs would impose on him. RP 496. The Court ordered Mr. Flett to begin making payments of \$5 per month commencing September 26, 2015. CP 87. The Court also ordered DNA testing. CP 87.

This appeal followed. CP 73-74.

¹ \$500 Victim Assessment, \$200 criminal filing, and \$100 DNA fee. CP 85-86.

D. ARGUMENT

1. Mr. Flett's right to due process under Washington Constitution, Article 1, § 3 and United States Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment was violated where the State failed to prove the aggravating circumstance of deliberate cruelty.²

As a part of the due process rights guaranteed under both the Washington Constitution, Article 1, § 3 and United States Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment the state must prove every element of a crime charged beyond a reasonable doubt. *State v. Baeza*, 100 Wn.2d 487, 488, 670 P.2d 646 (1983); *In re Winship*, 397 U.S. 358, 364, 90 S.Ct. 1068, 1073, 25 L.Ed.2d 368 (1970). As the United States Supreme Court explained in *Winship*: “[T]he use of the reasonable-doubt standard is indispensable to command the respect and confidence of the community in applications of the criminal law.” *In re Winship*, 397 U.S. at 364.

Mere possibility, suspicion, speculation, conjecture, or even a scintilla of evidence, is not substantial evidence, and does not meet the minimum requirements of due process. *State v. Moore*, 7 Wn. App. 1, 499 P.2d 16 (1972). As a result, any conviction not supported by substantial evidence may be attacked for the first time on appeal as a due process

² Assignments of Error Nos. 1-3.

violation. *Id.* “Substantial evidence” in the context of a criminal case, means evidence sufficient to persuade “an unprejudiced thinking mind of the truth of the fact to which the evidence is directed.” *State v. Taplin*, 9 Wn. App. 545, 513 P.2d 549 (1973) (quoting *State v. Collins*, 2 Wn. App. 757, 759, 470 P.2d 227, 228 (1970)).

In determining the sufficiency of the evidence, the test is "whether, after viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the State, any rational trier of fact could have found guilt beyond a reasonable doubt." *State v. Salinas*, 119 Wn.2d 192, 201, 829 P.2d 1068 (1992) (citing *State v. Green*, 94 Wn.2d 216, 220-22, 616 P.2d 628 (1980)). "When the sufficiency of the evidence is challenged in a criminal case, all reasonable inferences from the evidence must be drawn in favor of the State and interpreted most strongly against the defendant." *Salinas*, 119 Wn.2d at 201, 829 P.2d 1068 (citing *State v. Partin*, 88 Wn.2d 899, 906-07, 567 P.2d 1136 (1977)). "A claim of insufficiency admits the truth of the State's evidence and all inferences that reasonably can be drawn therefrom." *Salinas*, 119 Wn.2d at 201, 829 P.2d 1068 (citing *State v. Theroff*, 25 Wn. App. 590, 593, 608 P.2d 1254, aff'd, 95 Wn.2d 385, 622 P.2d 1240 (1980)).

While circumstantial evidence is no less reliable than direct evidence, *State v. Myers*, 133 Wn.2d 26, 38, 941 P.2d 1102 (1997), evidence is insufficient if the inferences drawn from it do not establish the requisite facts beyond a reasonable doubt. *Baeza*, 100 Wn.2d at 491, 670 P.2d 646. Specific criminal intent may be inferred from circumstances as a matter of logical probability." *State v. Zamora*, 63 Wn. App. 220, 223, 817 P.2d 880 (1991).

The Sixth Amendment requires the State to prove, and the jury to find beyond a reasonable doubt, all facts necessary to support an exceptional sentence. *Blakely v. Washington*, 542 U.S. 296, 302 n.5, 124 S.Ct.2531, (2004). The existence of an aggravating factor is a factual question, not a question of law. *State v. Suleiman*, 158 Wn.2d 280, 292-93, 143 P.3d 795 (2006). Thus, unless one of the listed aggravating factors is established solely by the jury verdict or the defendant's stipulation, it cannot be used to support an exceptional sentence. *State v. Flores*, 164 Wn.2d 1, 20, 186 P.3d 103 (2008). Aggravating circumstances are treated as elements of the charged crime for constitutional purposes. *Apprendi v. New Jersey*, 530 U.S. 466, 120 S.Ct. 2348, 2364-66, 147 L.Ed.2d 435 (2000).

The aggravating circumstance of “deliberate cruelty” requires a showing “of gratuitous violence or other conduct that inflicts physical, psychological, or emotional pain as an end in itself... [T]he cruelty must go beyond that normally associated with the commission of a charged offense or inherent in the elements of the offense.” *State v. Gordon*, 172 Wash. 2d 671, 680-81, 260 P.3d 884 (2011), citing *State v. Tili*, 148 Wash.2d 350, 369, 60 P.3d 1192 (2003).

In *Gordon*, the victim, Lewis, intervened in a fight between Gordon and a woman. A verbal confrontation between Lewis and Gordon escalated when Gordon hit Lewis in the face. As Lewis tried to run, he struck one of Gordon's friends, Knoefler. Gordon then punched Lewis several times, causing him to fall to the ground. Knoefler kicked Lewis in the head. Gordon and a third man began punching and kicking Lewis while he was on the ground. A fourth man arrived and put Lewis in a chokehold while the others continued kicking Lewis. The men dispersed when Knoefler saw a car coming and yelled that it might be police. Witnesses to the beating called law enforcement, and an ambulance arrived. While in the ambulance, Lewis suffered cardiac arrest and died about six minutes before the ambulance reached the hospital. *Gordon*, 172

Wash. 2d at 674-75. The Supreme Court upheld the finding of deliberate cruelty. *Id.* at 680.

In *Tili*, the Supreme Court also upheld the finding of deliberate cruelty where the defendant threatened to kill the victim, hit her in the head with a heavy metal pan until she collapsed on the floor, then raped her vaginally and anally multiple times, and further degraded the victim by forcing her to say she “liked it.” *Tili*, 148 Wash. 2d at 356, 370-71.

The Supreme Court similarly upheld the finding of deliberate cruelty in *State v. Copeland*, where the murderer assaulted the victim in at least two separate places in her apartment. At each location the force of the attack splattered blood on the walls of her home. The assailant struck her in the mouth and kicked her in the ribs, manually strangled her with such force that bones and cartilage in her neck were broken, and stabbed her leaving gaping wounds in her chest. He ripped an earring from the victim’s ear, punctured her back, arm and thigh with a barbecue fork, and raped her as she bled to death. *State v. Copeland*, 130 Wash. 2d 244, 297, 922 P.2d 1304 (1996).

A common factor in these cases finding deliberate cruelty is the infliction of unnecessary pain and prolonged suffering equivalent to torture

and/or humiliating or degrading the victim for an extended period time in a sadistic manner. However, Courts have found insufficient evidence to support a finding of deliberate cruelty based solely on the perpetrator inflicting multiple wounds or the location of the wounds, as occurred in the present case. For example, in *State v. Serrano*, the Court held the fact Mr. Serrano shot the victim five times does not by itself suggest he gratuitously inflicted pain as an end in itself. *State v. Serrano*, 95 Wash. App. 700, 713, 977 P.2d 47 (1999).

Similarly, in *State v. Payne*, the Court rejected the aggravating factor of “committing the crime in a heinous, cruel, or depraved manner,” where the 15-year-old victim was shot in the back six times and the defendant displayed a cavalier attitude and lack of feeling. The Court noted, “[T]he depravity of this particular crime, despite its tragic and disturbing nature, does not go beyond what could be said to be part of any act of murder. Thus, we must reject the “heinous, cruel, or depraved manner” of committing the crime as an aggravating factor.” *State v. Payne*, 58 Wash. App. 215, 220, 795 P.2d 134 (1990) *opinion corrected on reconsideration*, 805 P.2d 247 (1991).

The present case is more akin to *Payne* and *Serrano*. While multiple wounds were inflicted to the victim's head, the evidence did not show the violence was gratuitous or inflicted physical, psychological, or emotional pain as an end in itself, as occurred in the cases cited above where the appellate court upheld the finding of deliberate cruelty. Unlike those cases, Mr. Flett, according to the State's theory and evidence presented, had decided to kill the victim beforehand. His subsequent actions were solely intended to accomplish that purpose. There was no evidence he inflicted unnecessary pain and prolonged suffering equivalent to torture as an end in itself. Nor was there evidence he humiliated or degraded the victim for an extended period time in a sadistic manner.

Since the only basis to support the aggravating circumstance herein was the infliction of multiple wounds to the victim's head, the evidence is insufficient to support the finding of deliberate cruelty. Therefore, the exceptional sentence and corresponding special verdict should be vacated.

2. Since the directive to pay LFO's was based on an unsupported finding of ability to pay, the matter should be remanded for the sentencing court to make individualized inquiry into the defendant's current and future ability to pay before imposing LFOs.³

a. *This court should exercise its discretion and accept review.*

Mr. Flett did not make this argument below. However, the Washington Supreme Court has held the ability to pay legal financial LFOs may be raised for the first time on appeal by discretionary review. *State v. Blazina*, ___Wn.2d___, 344 P.3d 680, 683 (March 12, 2015). In *Blazina* the Court felt compelled to accept review under RAP 2.5(a) because “[n]ational and local cries for reform of broken LFO systems demand ... reach[ing] the merits” *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 683. The Court reviewed the pervasive nature of trial courts’ failures to consider each defendant’s ability to pay in conjunction with the unfair disparities and penalties that indigent defendants experience based upon this failure.

Public policy favors direct review by this Court. Indigent defendants who are saddled with wrongly imposed LFOs have many “reentry difficulties” that ultimately work against the State’s interest in accomplishing rehabilitation and reducing recidivism. *Blazina*, 344 P.3d

³ Assignment of Error No. 4.

at 684. Availability of a statutory remission process down the road does little to alleviate the harsh realities incurred by virtue of LFOs that are improperly imposed at the outset. As the *Blazina* Court bluntly recognized, one societal reality is “the state cannot collect money from defendants who cannot pay.” *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 684. Requiring defendants who never had the ability to pay LFOs to go through collections and a remission process to correct a sentencing error that could have been corrected on direct appeal is a financially wasteful use of administrative and judicial process. A more efficient use of state resources would result from this court’s remand back to the sentencing judge who is already familiar with the case to make the ability to pay inquiry.

As a final matter of public policy, this Court has the immediate opportunity to expedite reform of the broken LFO system. This Court should embrace its obligation to uphold and enforce the Washington Supreme Court’s decision that RCW 10.01.160(3) requires the sentencing judge to make an individualized inquiry on the record into the defendant’s current and future ability to pay before the court imposes LFOs. *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 685; see also *Bellevue John Does 1-11 v. Bellevue Sch. Dist. #405*, 129 Wn. App. 832, 867-68, 120 P.3d 616, 634 (2005) rev’d in part sub nom. *Bellevue John Does 1-11 v. Bellevue Sch. Dist. #405*, 164 Wn.2d

199, 189 P.3d 139 (2008) (The principle of stare decisis—“to stand by the thing decided”—binds the appellate court as well as the trial court to follow Supreme Court decisions). This requirement applies to the sentencing court in Mr. Flett’s case regardless of his failure to object. See, *Kitsap Alliance of Prop. Owners v. Cent. Puget Sound Growth Mgmt. Hearings Bd.*, 160 Wn. App. 250, 259-60, 255 P.3d 696, 701 (2011) (“Once the Washington Supreme Court has authoritatively construed a statute, the legislation is considered to have always meant that interpretation.”)(citations omitted).

The sentencing court’s signature on a judgment and sentence with boilerplate language stating that it engaged in the required inquiry is wholly inadequate to meet the requirement. *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 685. Post-*Blazina*, one would expect future trial courts to make the appropriate inquiry on the record or defense attorneys to object in order to preserve the error for direct review. Mr. Flett respectfully submits that in order to ensure he and all indigent defendants are treated as the LFO statute requires, this Court should reach the unpreserved error and accept review. *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 687 (FAIRHURST, J. (concurring in the result)).

b. *Substantive argument.*

There is insufficient evidence to support the trial court's finding that Mr. Flett has the present and future ability to pay legal financial obligations. Courts may require an indigent defendant to reimburse the state for costs only if the defendant has the financial ability to do so. *Fuller v. Oregon*, 417 U.S. 40, 47-48, 94 S.Ct. 2116, 40 L.Ed.2d 642 (1974); *State v. Curry*, 118 Wn.2d 911, 915-16, 829 P.2d 166 (1992); RCW 10.01.160(3); RCW 9.94A.760(2). The imposition of costs under a scheme that does not meet with these requirements, or the imposition of a penalty for a failure to pay absent proof that the defendant had the ability to pay, violates the defendant's right to equal protection under Washington Constitution, Article 1, § 12 and United States Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment. *Fuller v. Oregon*, supra. It further violates equal protection by imposing extra punishment on a defendant due to his or her poverty. *Bearden v. Georgia*, 461 U.S. 660, 665, 103 S.Ct. 2064, 2071, 76 L.Ed.2d 221 (1983).

RCW 9.94A.760(1) provides that upon a criminal conviction, a superior court "may order the payment of a legal financial obligation." RCW 10.01.160(1) authorizes a superior court to "require a defendant to pay costs." These costs "shall be limited to expenses specially incurred by

the state in prosecuting the defendant.” RCW 10.01.160(2). In addition, “[t]he court shall not order a defendant to pay costs unless the defendant is or will be able to pay them.” RCW 10.01.160(3). RCW 10.01.160(3) requires the record to reflect that the sentencing judge made an individualized inquiry into the defendant's current and future ability to pay before the court imposes LFOs. *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 685. “This inquiry also requires the court to consider important factors, such as incarceration and a defendant's other debts, including restitution, when determining a defendant's ability to pay.” *Id.* The remedy for a trial court’s failure to make this inquiry is remand for a new sentencing hearing. *Id.*

Blazina further held trial courts should look to the comment in court rule GR 34 for guidance. *Id.* This rule allows a person to obtain a waiver of filing fees and surcharges on the basis of indigent status, and the comment to the rule lists ways that a person may prove indigent status. *Id.* (citing GR 34). For example, under the rule, courts must find a person indigent if the person establishes that he or she receives assistance from a needs-based, means-tested assistance program, such as Social Security or food stamps. *Id.* (citing comment to GR 34 listing facts that prove indigent status). In addition, courts must find a person indigent if his or her household income falls below 125 percent of the federal poverty

guideline. *Id.* Although the ways to establish indigent status remain nonexhaustive, if someone does meet the GR 34 standard for indigency, courts should seriously question that person's ability to pay LFOs. *Id.*

While the ability to pay is a necessary threshold to the imposition of costs, a court need not make formal specific findings of ability to pay: "[n]either the statute nor the constitution requires a trial court to enter formal, specific findings regarding a defendant's ability to pay court costs." *Curry*, 118 Wn.2d at 916. However, *Curry* recognized that both RCW 10.01.160 and the federal constitution "direct [a court] to consider ability to pay." *Id.* at 915-16. The individualized inquiry must be made on the record. *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 685.

Here, the judgment and sentence contains a boilerplate statement that the trial court has "considered" Mr. Flett's past, present and future ability to pay legal financial obligations. CP 82. A finding must have support in the record. A trial court's findings of fact must be supported by substantial evidence. *State v. Brockob*, 159 Wn.2d 311, 343, 150 P.3d 59 (2006) (citing *Nordstrom Credit, Inc. v. Dep't of Revenue*, 120 Wn.2d 935, 939, 845 P.2d 1331 (1993)). The trial court's determination "as to the defendant's resources and ability to pay is essentially factual and should be reviewed under the clearly erroneous standard." *State v. Bertrand*, 165

Wn. App. 393, 267 P.3d 511, 517 fn.13 (2011), citing *State v. Baldwin*, 63 Wn. App. 303, 312, 818 P.2d 1116, 837 P.2d 646 (1991).

“Although *Baldwin* does not require formal findings of fact about a defendant's present or future ability to pay LFOs, the record must be sufficient for [the appellate court] to review whether ‘the trial court judge took into account the financial resources of the defendant and the nature of the burden imposed by LFOs under the clearly erroneous standard.’ ”
Bertrand, 165 Wn. App. 393, 267 P.3d at 517, citing *Baldwin*, 63 Wn. App. at 312 (bracketed material added) (internal citation omitted).

Here, despite the boilerplate language in paragraph 2.5 of the judgment and sentence, the record does not show the trial court took into account Mr. Flett's financial resources and the potential burden of imposing LFOs on him. RP 496. The Court ordered Mr. Flett to begin making payments of \$5 per month commencing September 26, 2015. CP 87.

The boilerplate finding that Mr. Flett has the present or future ability to pay LFOs is simply not supported by the record. Therefore, the matter should be remanded for the sentencing court to make an individualized inquiry into Mr. Flett 's current and future ability to pay before imposing LFOs. *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 685.

3. RCW 43.43.7541 violates substantive due process and is unconstitutional as applied to defendants who do not have the ability or likely future ability to pay the mandatory \$100 DNA collection fee.⁴

Both the Washington and United States Constitutions mandate that no person may be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. U.S. Const. amend. V, XIV; Wash. Const. art. I, § 3. “The due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment confers both procedural and substantive protections.” *Amunrud v. Bd. of Appeals*, 158 Wn.2d 208, 216, 143 P.3d 571 (2006) (citation omitted).

“Substantive due process protects against arbitrary and capricious government action even when the decision to take action is pursuant to constitutionally adequate procedures.” *Id.* at 218–19. It requires that “deprivations of life, liberty, or property be substantively reasonable;” in other words, such deprivations are constitutionally infirm if not “supported by some legitimate justification.” *Nielsen v. Washington State Dep't of Licensing*, 177 Wn. App. 45, 52–53, 309 P.3d 1221 (2013) (citing Russell W. Galloway, Jr., *Basic Substantive Due Process Analysis*, 26 U.S.F. L.Rev. 625, 625–26 (1992)).

Where a fundamental right is not at issue, as is the case here, the

⁴ Assignment of Error No. 5.

rational basis standard applies. *Nielsen*, 177 Wn. App. at 53–54.

To survive rational basis scrutiny, the State must show its regulation is rationally related to a legitimate state interest. *Id.* Although the burden on the State is lighter under this standard, the standard is not meaningless. The United States Supreme Court has cautioned the rational basis test “is not a toothless one.” *Mathews v. DeCastro*, 429 U.S. 181, 185, 97 S.Ct. 431, 50 L.Ed.2d 389 (1976). As the Washington Supreme Court has explained, “the court's role is to assure that even under this deferential standard of review the challenged legislation is constitutional.” *DeYoung v. Providence Med. Ctr.*, 136 Wn.2d 136, 144, 960 P.2d 919 (1998) (determining that statute at issue did not survive rational basis scrutiny); *Nielsen*, 177 Wn. App. at 61 (same). Statutes that do not rationally relate to a legitimate State interest must be struck down as unconstitutional under the substantive due process clause. *Id.*

Here, the statute mandates all felony offenders pay the DNA-collection fee. RCW 43.43.754⁵. This ostensibly serves the State’s

⁵ RCW 43.43.7541 provides:

Every sentence imposed for a crime specified in RCW 43.43.754 must include a fee of one hundred dollars. The fee is a court-ordered legal financial obligation as defined in RCW 9.94A.030 and other applicable law. For a sentence imposed under chapter 9.94A RCW, the fee is payable by the offender after payment of all other legal financial obligations included in the sentence has been completed. For all other sentences, the fee is payable by the offender in the same manner as other assessments imposed. The clerk of the court shall transmit eighty percent of the fee collected to the state treasurer for deposit in the state DNA database

interest to fund the collection, analysis, and retention of a convicted offender's DNA profile in order to help facilitate future criminal identifications. RCW 43.43.752–.7541. This is a legitimate interest. But the imposition of this mandatory fee upon defendants who cannot pay the fee does not rationally serve that interest.

It is unreasonable to require sentencing courts to impose the DNA-collection fee upon all felony defendants regardless of whether they have the ability or likely future ability to pay. The blanket requirement does not further the State's interest in funding DNA collection and preservation. As the Washington Supreme Court frankly recognized, "the state cannot collect money from defendants who cannot pay." *Blazina*, ___ Wn.2d ___, 344 P.3d at 684. When applied to indigent defendants, the mandatory fee orders are pointless. It is irrational for the State to mandate that trial courts impose this debt upon defendants who cannot pay.

In response, the State may argue the \$100 DNA collection-fee is such a small amount that most defendants would likely be able to pay. The problem with this argument, however, is this fee does not stand alone.

The Legislature expressly directs that the fee is "payable by the

account created under RCW 43.43.7532, and shall transmit twenty percent of the fee collected to the agency responsible for collection of a biological sample from the offender as required under RCW 43.43.754.

offender after payment of all other legal financial obligations included in the sentence.” RCW 43.43.7541. Thus, the fee is paid only after restitution, the victim’s compensation assessment, and all other LFOs have been satisfied. As such, the statute makes this the least likely fee to be paid by an indigent defendant.

Additionally, the defendant will be saddled with a 12% rate on his unpaid DNA-collection fee, making the actual debt incurred even more onerous in ways that reach far beyond his financial situation. The imposition of mounting debt upon people who cannot pay actually works against another important State interest – reducing recidivism. See, *Blazina*, 344 P.3d at 683–84 (discussing the cascading effect of LFOs with an accompanying 12% interest rate and examining the detrimental impact to rehabilitation that comes with ordering fees that cannot be paid).

When applied to defendants who do not have the ability or likely ability to pay, the mandatory imposition of the DNA-collection fee does not rationally relate to the State’s interest in funding the collection, testing, and retention of an individual defendant’s DNA. Therefore, RCW 43.43.7541 violates substantive due process as applied. Based on Mr. Flett’s indigent status, the order to pay the \$100 DNA collection fee should be vacated.

4. RCW 43.43.7541 violates equal protection because it irrationally requires some defendants to pay a DNA-collection fee multiple times, while others need pay only once.⁶

The equal protection clauses of the state and federal constitutions require that persons similarly situated with respect to the legitimate purpose of the law receive like treatment. U.S. Const. amend. XIV; Wash. Const., art. I, § 12; *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98, 104–05, 121 S. Ct. 525, 148 L. Ed. 2d 388 (2000); *State v. Thorne*, 129 Wn.2d 736, 770–71, 921 P.2d 514 (1994). A valid law administered in a manner that unjustly discriminates between similarly situated persons, violates equal protection. *State v. Gaines*, 121 Wn. App. 687, 704, 90 P.3d 1095 (2004) (citations omitted).

Before an equal protection analysis may be applied, a defendant must establish he is similarly situated with other affected persons. *Gaines*, 121 Wn. App. at 704. In this case, the relevant group is all defendants subject to the mandatory DNA-collection fee under RCW 43.43.7541. Having been convicted of a felony, Mr. Flett is similarly situated to other affected persons within this affected group. See, RCW 43.43.754, .7541.

On review, where neither a suspect/semi-suspect class nor a

⁶ Assignment of Error No. 5.

fundamental right is at issue, a rational basis analysis is used to evaluate the validity of the differential treatment. *State v. Bryan*, 145 Wn. App. 353, 358, 185 P.3d 1230 (2008). That standard applies here.

Under rational basis scrutiny, a legislative enactment that, in effect, creates different classes will survive an equal protection challenge only if: (1) there are reasonable grounds to distinguish between different classes of affected individuals; and (2) the classification has a rational relationship to the proper purpose of the legislation. *DeYoung*, 136 Wn.2d at 144. Where a statute fails to meet these standards, it must be struck down as unconstitutional. *Id.*

The Legislature has declared that collection of DNA samples and their retention in a DNA database are important tools in “assist[ing] federal, state, and local criminal justice and law enforcement agencies in both the identification and detection of individuals in criminal investigations and the identification and location of missing and unidentified persons.” Laws of 2008 c 97, Preamble. The DNA profile from a convicted offender’s biological sample is entered into the Washington State Patrol’s DNA identification system (database) and retained until expunged or no longer qualified to be retained. WAC 446-75-010; WAC 446-75-060. Every sentence imposed for a felony crime

must include a mandatory fee of \$100. RCW 43.43.754, .7541.

The purpose of RCW 43.43.754 is to fund the collection, analysis, and retention of an individual felony offender's identifying DNA profile for inclusion in a database of DNA records. Once a defendant's DNA is collected, tested, and entered into the database, subsequent collections are unnecessary. This is because DNA – for identification purposes – does not change. The statute itself recognizes this, expressly stating it is unnecessary to collect more than one sample. RCW 43.43.754(2). There is no further biological sample to collect with respect to defendants who have already had their DNA profiles entered into the database.

Here, RCW 43.43.7541 does not apply equally to all felony defendants because those who are sentenced more than once have to pay the fee multiple times. This classification is unreasonable because multiple payments are not rationally related to the legitimate purpose of the law, which is to fund the collection, analysis, and retention of an individual felony offender's identifying DNA profile.

RCW 43.43.7541 discriminates against felony defendants who have previously been sentenced by requiring them to pay multiple DNA-collection fees, while other felony defendants need only pay one DNA-collection fee. The mandatory requirement that the fee be collected from

such defendants upon each sentencing is not rationally related to the purpose of the statute. As such, RCW 43.43.7541 violates equal protection. The DNA-collection fee order must be vacated.

5. The trial court abused its discretion when it ordered Mr. Flett to submit to another collection of his DNA.⁷

A trial court abuses its discretion if its decision is “manifestly unreasonable,” based on “untenable grounds,” or made for “untenable reasons.” *State ex rel. Carroll v. Junker*, 79 Wn.2d 12, 26, 482 P.2d 775 (1971). “A decision is based on untenable grounds or made for untenable reasons if it rests on facts unsupported in the record or was reached by applying the wrong legal standard.” *State v. Rohrich*, 149 Wn.2d 647, 654, 71 P.3d 638 (2003).

RCW 43.43.754(1) requires a biological sample “must be collected” when an individual is convicted of a felony offense. RCW 43.43.754(2) provides: “If the Washington state patrol crime laboratory already has a DNA sample from an individual for a qualifying offense, a subsequent submission is not required to be submitted.” Thus, the trial court has discretion as to whether to order the collection of an offender’s DNA under such circumstances.

⁷ Assignment of Error 5.

It is manifestly unreasonable for a sentencing court to order a defendant's DNA to be collected pursuant to RCW 43.43.754(1) where the record discloses that the defendant's DNA has already been collected. The Legislature recognizes that collecting more than one DNA sample from an individual is unnecessary. It is also a waste of judicial, state, and local law enforcement resources when sentencing courts issue duplicative DNA collection orders.

Here, Mr. Flett's DNA was previously collected pursuant to the statute. He had seven prior felony convictions dated 2002 or later. CP 80-81. These prior convictions required collection of a biological sample for purposes of DNA identification analysis pursuant to the current statute. RCW 43.43.754(6)(a); Laws of 2008 c 97 § 2, eff. June 12, 2008; Laws of 2002 c 289 § 2, eff. July 1, 2002. Since the prior convictions occurred in 2002 or later, Mr. Flett was assessed \$100 DNA collection fees at the time of these prior sentencings. There is no evidence suggesting his DNA had not been collected and placed in the DNA database. Mr. Flett fell within the parameters of RCW 43.43.754(2) and a subsequent DNA sample was not required. Under these circumstances, it was manifestly unreasonable for the sentencing court to order him to submit to another collection of his DNA. Therefore, the collection order should be reversed.

E. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated, the exceptional sentence and the order to pay the \$100 DNA collection fee should be vacated and the case remanded for resentencing within the standard range. On remand, the superior court should make an individualized inquiry into Mr. Flett's current and future ability to pay before imposing LFOs.

Respectfully submitted August 20, 2015,

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PROOF OF SERVICE (RAP 18.5(b))

I, David N. Gasch, do hereby certify under penalty of perjury that on August 20, 2015, I mailed to the following by U.S. Postal Service first class mail, postage prepaid, or provided e-mail service by prior agreement (as indicated), a true and correct copy of the brief of appellant:

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