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COURT OF APPEALS
DIVISION III
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

STATE OF WASHINGTON, DEFENDANT

v.

E.R.M., APPELLANT

APPEAL FROM THE SUPERIOR COURT
OF SPOKANE COUNTY

BRIEF OF RESPONDENT

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INDEX

I. APPELLANT’S ASSIGNMENT OF ERROR..... 1

II. ISSUE PRESENTED..... 1

III. STATEMENT OF THE CASE 1

IV. ARGUMENT 1

 A. RCW 43.43.754, BY ITS PLAIN LANGUAGE, REQUIRES THAT ALL PERSONS CONVICTED OF A FELONY, INCLUDING JUVENILES, HAVE A DNA SAMPLE TAKEN. 2

 B. A DEFERRED DISPOSITION, WHILE ACTIVE, IS A CONVICTION FOR THE PURPOSES OF RCW 43.43.754, EVEN IF SUBSEQUENTLY VACATED. 4

 C. RCW 43.43.754 IS NOT AMBIGUOUS AND SO THE CANONS OF CONSTRUCTION DO NOT APPLY. 7

V. CONCLUSION 10

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Washington Cases

State v. D.P.G., 169 Wn. App. 396, 280 P.3d 1139 (2012) 4

State v. Keller, 143 Wn.2d 267, 19 P.3d 1030 (2001) 1, 7

State v. S.S., 122 Wn. App. 725, 94 P.3d 1002 (2004) 2

State v. Surge, 160 Wn.2d 65, 156 P.3d 208 (2007)..... 2

State v. Torres, 151 Wn. App. 378, 212 P.3d 573 (2009)..... 3

State v. Watson, 146 Wn.2d 947, 51 P.3d 66 (2002) 7

Statutes

RCW 9.41.040 5

RCW 9.94A.030..... 2, 4, 6, 9

RCW 13.40.010 4

RCW 13.40.127 1, 4, 5

RCW 43.43.754 passim

RCW 43.43.7541 3, 9

RCW 46.20.285 6

I. APPELLANT'S ASSIGNMENT OF ERROR

The juvenile court erred in ordering collection of appellant's DNA sample.

II. ISSUE PRESENTED

Is a juvenile who enters a deferred disposition for a felony crime required to submit a DNA sample upon the court's acceptance of the deferred disposition agreement, or only upon revocation?

III. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On September 12, 2019, E.R.M., a minor, was charged with attempting to elude a police vehicle. CP 5. E.R.M. requested a deferred disposition on his case, as authorized by RCW 13.40.127. CP 14. Spokane County Superior Court, Juvenile Division, Judge Anderson, granted the defendant's motion and entered a finding of guilty, with disposition to be deferred until September 30, 2020. CP 21-22. Defendant objected to collection of DNA and the court stayed collection pending appeal. CP 15, 24. Defendant timely appealed. CP 29.

IV. ARGUMENT

Standard of review.

The interpretation of statute is a question of law reviewed *de novo*. *State v. Keller*, 143 Wn.2d 267, 276, 19 P.3d 1030 (2001).

A. RCW 43.43.754, BY ITS PLAIN LANGUAGE, REQUIRES THAT ALL PERSONS CONVICTED OF A FELONY, INCLUDING JUVENILES, HAVE A DNA SAMPLE TAKEN.

Every adult or juvenile convicted of a felony, or certain enumerated misdemeanors, must have a DNA sample taken for the purpose of identification. RCW 43.43.754. Such collection is constitutionally permissible, *State v. Surge*, 160 Wn.2d 65, 74, 156 P.3d 208, 212 (2007); even if the convicted person is a juvenile, *State v. S.S.*, 122 Wn. App. 725, 727, 94 P.3d 1002 (2004). No private affair is disturbed by these collections “because collecting identifying information from convicted felons does not infringe on a privacy interest that convicted felons of this state have held, or should be entitled to hold, safe from government trespass.” *Surge*, 160 Wn.2d at 74. Conviction means an adjudication of guilt pursuant to Title 13 RCW and includes a verdict of guilty, a finding of guilty, and acceptance of a plea of guilty. RCW 9.94A.030.

In *Surge*, the Supreme Court compared the collection of DNA to the collection of fingerprints (which remain on file subsequent to an arrest, even if a defendant is later found not guilty or has a case vacated or sealed). Specifically, the court stated: “It is a well established practice of government to collect fingerprints from convicted felons for identification purposes. We find no distinction between that practice and the collection of DNA.” 160 Wn.2d at 74.

The plain language of RCW 43.43.754 states that a conviction triggers the requirement to provide a DNA sample. Immediately adjacent to the statute requiring a DNA sample be taken is the statute which imposes the fee associated with such sampling. RCW 43.43.7541 provides for a \$100 DNA testing fee to be imposed as part of a sentence in any case which requires DNA collection from a defendant who has not previously had their DNA collected pursuant to a prior conviction. Comparison of the language used in RCW 43.43.754 and RCW 43.43.7541 is illustrative. RCW 43.43.754, the statute which mandates DNA collection, uses the term “conviction” as the triggering event for the requirement. Conversely, RCW 43.43.7541 specifies the fee for such collection be imposed as part of “sentence.” The legislature is presumed to both know the law in the area in which it is legislating and know the definitions of words used in statutes. *State v. Torres*, 151 Wn. App. 378, 385, 212 P.3d 573 (2009). Here, different terms were chosen in sequential statutes, implying that the triggering event for each statute is different.¹ If the legislature had intended the two triggering events in these statutes to be synonymous with imposition

¹ While RCW 43.43.7541 states that every applicable sentence shall include the DNA fee mentioned, this does not logically preclude the DNA fee from being assessed in other appropriate circumstances. However, this issue is not before the court.

of sentence, the same terms would have been used. Because they were not, the plain meaning dictates otherwise.

B. A DEFERRED DISPOSITION, WHILE ACTIVE, IS A CONVICTION FOR THE PURPOSES OF RCW 43.43.754, EVEN IF SUBSEQUENTLY VACATED.

The Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 was intended to keep juvenile offenders accountable for their actions, while also providing for rehabilitation and reintegration of juvenile offenders, and protecting the citizenry from criminal behavior. RCW 13.40.010. Furthering these goals, qualifying juvenile offenders may avail themselves of a deferred disposition for certain criminal offenses. RCW 13.40.127. “When a deferred disposition is granted, the respondent is found guilty upon stipulated facts, and disposition is deferred pending satisfaction of conditions of supervision that the court specifies. If the juvenile completes all supervision conditions, the conviction will be vacated and the case dismissed with prejudice.” *State v. D.P.G.*, 169 Wn. App. 396, 399, 280 P.3d 1139 (2012).

While a juvenile offender may successfully complete the requirements of the deferred disposition agreement and subsequently receive a vacation of their conviction, until that process occurs, their conviction exists. A conviction includes a finding of guilt, plea of guilty, or adjudication of guilt. RCW 9.94A.030. The deferred disposition statute itself acknowledges the existence of the conviction, stating: “A deferred

disposition shall *remain* a conviction unless the case is dismissed and the conviction is vacated pursuant to (b) of this subsection or sealed pursuant to RCW 13.50.260.” RCW 13.40.127(9)(c) (emphasis added). Indeed, the fact that a conviction occurs and remains in place until and unless vacated is part of the statement made by the juvenile requesting a deferred disposition. CP 11. Even the order granting a deferred disposition reflects that a conviction has occurred and will remain until vacated, stating that “[t]he court found the respondent guilty.” CP 21. The same document orders the taking of DNA, in accordance with RCW 43.43.754.

The collection of a DNA sample at the time of a juvenile’s entry into a deferred disposition finds analogy with firearms prohibition and notification to the Department of Licensing (DOL), both of which also occur when the court makes a finding of guilty and authorizes a deferred disposition. *See* CP 24-25. RCW 9.41.040(3) refers to firearm rights and the relevant portion reads:

(3) Notwithstanding RCW 9.41.047 or any other provisions of law, as used in this chapter, a person has been “convicted,” whether in an adult court or adjudicated in a juvenile court, at such time as a plea of guilty has been accepted or a verdict of guilty has been filed, notwithstanding the pendency of any future proceedings including, but not limited to, sentencing or disposition, post-trial or post-fact-finding motions, and appeals. Conviction includes a dismissal entered after a period of probation, suspension, or deferral of sentence, and also includes equivalent dispositions by courts in jurisdictions other than Washington state.

The language clearly requires that juvenile defendants entering a deferred disposition agreement be prohibited from possessing firearms at the time of their entry into that agreement, not disposition. Conviction triggers the event, regardless of what may happen in the future.

Similarly, in the situation where a defendant has been convicted of a crime that requires DOL be notified of the offense, this too is required to be ordered by the court at the time of conviction, not disposition. RCW 46.20.285 requires DOL to “revoke the license of any driver ... upon receiving a record of the driver’s conviction of any of the following offenses ... (4) Any felony in the commission of which a motor vehicle is used.” The revocation does not take effect until the conviction has become final, but the notification is sent upon conviction, not disposition. *See* CP 24. The wording in RCW 46.20.285 specifies that the contemplated revocation is implemented “when the conviction has become final,” showing that the legislature differentiates between conviction and a final disposition when intended. Such language is lacking in RCW 43.43.754.

Defendant argues that a finding of guilty as part of a deferred disposition agreement is not a conviction in this context, and that DNA collection is part of the sentence and so should not be imposed until disposition, but this is simply incorrect. RCW 9.94A.030 defines conviction and it includes a finding of guilty, which occurred in this case.

RCW 43.43.754 mandates the collection of a DNA sample from anyone convicted of a felony, not as a punitive measure, or only as part of a sentence, but as an independent requirement imposed on the convicted individual. This requirement stands alone, regardless of any sentence that may or may not eventually be imposed. Because it is the conviction that triggers the requirement of a DNA sample, and because a conviction exists for a juvenile undergoing a deferred disposition, the plain meaning of the law requires that a juvenile convicted of a felony submit a DNA sample upon entry of the deferred disposition agreement.

C. RCW 43.43.754 IS NOT AMBIGUOUS AND SO THE CANONS OF CONSTRUCTION DO NOT APPLY.

Statutory interpretation is a question of law. *Keller*, 143 Wn.2d 267. If a statute is clear on its face, the meaning is derived from its plain language. *State v. Watson*, 146 Wn.2d 947, 954, 51 P.3d 66 (2002). “A statute is unclear if it can be reasonably interpreted in more than one way. However, it is not ambiguous simply because different interpretations are conceivable.” *Id.* at 954-55. An unambiguous statute is not subject to judicial construction. *Id.* at 955. A reviewing court will not “insert words into a statute where the language, taken as a whole, is clear and unambiguous.” *Id.*

Defendant argues that RCW 43.43.754 is ambiguous and asks the court to effectively insert additional language into the law. Where the statute says “conviction,” defendant’s arguments invite the court to read “final conviction” or “conviction after [deferred] disposition.” To conceptually add such language when the plain meaning is different and unambiguous would be inappropriate. If the legislature wishes to adopt defendant’s position, it need only amend the statute. Barring that, the plain meaning controls. Until, and unless, a vacation occurs, a juvenile undergoing a deferred disposition has still been convicted of a felony and is subject to the requirement of a DNA sample.

Defendant argues that “[i]t is not logical that the legislature would require the payment of the DNA collection fee in every sentence where a DNA sample is ordered and not in every order requiring collection of a DNA sample if it intended to authorize the court to order a DNA sample where no sentence had been entered.” Appellant’s Br. at 10. There are at least two reasonable responses to this argument, either of which would be sufficient to rebut it. First, it may be the case that juveniles who successfully complete their deferred disposition derive the benefit of doing so by saving money on otherwise imposed legal financial obligations, and the DNA sampling program is sufficiently funded by the fees imposed in other cases. Second, the court has the authority to impose the DNA testing fee outlined

in RCW 43.43.7541 when DNA samples are ordered, even outside the context of a sentence imposed at disposition. Defendant claims this is an illogical reading, but there is nothing inherently illogical about the legislature granting the court authority in this manner. It is important to note that the statute states that “every sentence ... must include a [DNA] fee,” but that this is not logically equivalent to saying that a DNA fee may *only* be imposed as part of sentence. While this precise issue is not before the court, it is reasonable to interpret the statutory scheme as allowing courts the discretion to impose (or not impose) the DNA fee in situations other than as part of a relevant sentence.

Finally, defendant argues that the rule of lenity should apply to the timing of DNA collection. Appellant’s Br. at 11. But this is putting the cart before the horse; the rule of lenity, like the canons of construction generally, does not apply in this situation because the statute is not ambiguous, nor is the DNA sample requirement punitive. Defendant argues that RCW 43.43.754 is ambiguous because, *inter alia*, “[f]or purposes of collecting a DNA sample from a juvenile offender, the narrow interpretation of ‘conviction’ does not encompass a deferred disposition.” *Id.* However, conviction is defined in the criminal code, and that definition specifically references Title 13, in which the Juvenile Justice Act resides. RCW 9.94A.030. It is not that a deferred disposition is itself a conviction,

it is that a conviction occurs (even if only temporarily) as part of a deferred disposition. To argue that a statute is ambiguous because the legislature didn't intend "conviction" to mean a conviction is to attempt to manufacture ambiguity where there is the opposite.

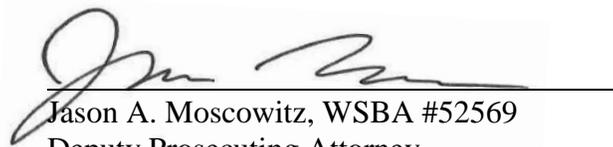
V. CONCLUSION

Because defendant was convicted of a felony, he must submit a DNA sample. That defendant's conviction occurred as part of a juvenile deferred disposition does not entitle him to delay the collection of the DNA sample until revocation of the deferred disposition. RCW 43.43.754 is not ambiguous, and, by its plain meaning, requires defendant to comply with collection.

The trial court correctly ruled that, upon entry of a deferred disposition agreement, defendant was obliged to submit a DNA sample. Accordingly, the State respectfully requests that this Court affirm the lower court's ruling.

Dated this 23 day of June, 2020.

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

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Respondent,

v.

E. R. M.,

Appellant.

NO. 37312-6-III

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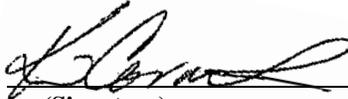
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