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Court of Appeals
Division I
State of Washington

NO. 73562-4-I

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

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Respondent,

v.

KEVIN GROTHAUS,

Appellant.

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

The Honorable Mary Dingledy, Judge

BRIEF OF APPELLANT

JENNIFER L. DOBSON
DANA M. NELSON
Attorneys for Appellant

NIELSEN, BROMAN & KOCH, PLLC
1908 E Madison Street
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 623-2373

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A. ASSIGNMENTS OF ERROR

1. Appellant was denied his right to a fair trial when a witness made an explicit comment on his guilt.

2. RCW 43.43.7541's DNA-collection fee and RCW 7.68.035's Victim Penalty Assessment (VPA) violate substantive due process when applied to defendants who do not have the ability – or likely future ability – to pay.

3. The trial court failed to comply with RCW 10.01.130(3) and, thus, erred in imposing Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs).

Issues Pertaining to Assignments of Error

1. Appellant was charged with one count of second degree theft and one count of trafficking in stolen property. Prior to trial, the court ordered there be no comments on guilt and ordered the prosecutor to inform witnesses as to this pretrial ruling. The prosecutor did not discuss this ruling with his witness. During direct examination, the witness stated that appellant's action constituted "theft." Did this explicit comment on guilt deny appellant a fair jury trial?

2. RCW 43.43.7541 requires trial courts impose a DNA-collection fee each time a felony offender is sentenced.[1] This ostensibly serves the State's interest in funding the collection, testing, and retention of a convicted defendant's DNA profile. RCW 7.68.035 requires trial courts to impose a VPA of $500. The purpose is to fund victim-focused programs. These statutes mandate that trial courts order these LFOs even when the defendant has no ability to pay. Do the statutes violate substantive due process when applied to defendants who do not have the ability – or the likely future ability – to pay the fees?

3. The Supreme Court recently emphasized that "a trial court has a statutory obligation [under RCW 10.01.160(3)] to make an individualized inquiry into a defendant's current and future ability to pay before the court imposes LFOs." State v. Blazina, 182 Wn.2d 827, 830, 344 P.3d 680 (2015). Here, the trial court was informed as to appellant's unemployment and lack of resources, but it imposed so-called "mandatory" LFOs without any consideration of

[1] RCW 43.43.754 and 43.43.7541 require the courts to impose a mandatory $100 DNA-collection fee on any offender convicted of a felony or of a specifically designated misdemeanor. For clarity and ease of reading, appellant will refer only to felony defendants in this brief, but the arguments apply equally to defendants sentenced to other qualifying crimes.

his ability to pay. Should this Court remand with instructions to strike the LFOs and undertake a proper inquiry?

B. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

1. Procedural History

On January 17, 2014, the Snohomish County prosecutor charged appellant Kevin Grothaus with one count of trafficking in stolen property. CP 70-71. The information was later amended, and the prosecutor added one count of second degree theft. CP 61-62. A jury found Grothaus guilty as charged. CP 27-28. He was sentenced to 90 days of electronic home monitoring and six months community custody. CP 16-17. The trial court also imposed a $100 DNA-collection fee and a $500 VPA, believing these to be "mandatory" fees. CP 18. Grothaus appeals. CP 1-12

2. Substantive Facts

In the fall of 2012, Grothaus was going through a particularly difficult time in his life. RP 262. He was going through a difficult break-up with his girlfriend. RP 262. His daughter left him to go live with her mother. RP 262. He lost two beloved dogs. RP 262. Additionally, Grothaus was suffering significant economic problems, including unemployment. RP 62, 262. He began to pawn his own possessions. RP 263. All of these tribulations made him

depressed. RP 263.

In November 2012, Grothaus approached Joe and Gina Myers, his neighbors and former employers, and said he needed a job because he was completely broke and had no tools. RP 62. Grothaus had previously worked for the Myerses construction company as a framer, and Joe thought the quality of his framing was excellent. RP 59, 61. The Myerses hired Grothaus, providing him with a company truck, cell phone, and tools for his job. RP 63. Shortly thereafter, Grothaus began pawning Joe's tools, but taking them out of pawn when Joe specifically asked for a certain tool. RP 70, 265, 268. Grothaus did not intend to permanently deprive the Myerses of the tools and, thus, never sold anything to the pawn shops. RP 197, 268-69, 279.

Grothaus' employment ended on March 5, 2013, due to his failure to show up during work hours. Grothaus said he quit, but Joe said he was fired. RP 71, 282. Later that day, Grothaus returned the truck with only a few tools in it. RP 74, 276. A few days later, he sent a letter to the Myerses apologizing for letting them down and saying he would get the rest of the tools soon. RP 146-48, 278. Grothaus was waiting for his last paycheck from the Myerses that covered the time before his employment ended so

that he could get the tools out of pawn. RP 275. He was never paid, however, and was unable to retrieve the tools. RP 274-75.

Eventually, Gina called the police. RP 144. Snohomish County Sheriff Detective Steven Clinko was assigned the case. RP 167. He obtained pawn records and discovered that Grothaus had pawned numerous items at four different pawn shops in the area. RP 169, 172. Clinko went to the shops, retrieved the tools, and gave them back to the Myerses after Joe was able to identify them by the company's unique mark. RP 172, 178, 182. Grothaus later admitted to Clinko he had pawned the tools. RP 202.

Prior to trial, defense counsel moved to exclude all comments on guilt. RP 26-27; CP 58. This was granted. RP 27. Defense counsel also moved to have the prosecutor inform witnesses about this ruling. CP 60; RP 27. This was also granted. RP 27. However, the prosecutor never informed Joe regarding the pre-trial order against a witness commenting on guilt. RP 90.

During Joe's direct examination, the following exchanged occurred:

> Q: The defendant, while he was permitted to use those tools, was he permitted to pawn them? Did you ever give him that say-so?
>
> A: That's theft. No.

RP 89. Defense counsel immediately objected. RP 89. The jury was removed and defense counsel moved for a mistrial. RP 89-90.

The prosecutor admitted that the pre-trial orders had been violated, but said a limiting instruction would suffice to remedy the situation. RP 90-91. The trial court agreed with the prosecutor and – without any input form defense counsel as to what an effective limiting instruction might be – merely instructed the jury as follows:

> Just before you left there was an objection. Regarding that objection, the portion of the answer that was "no" will stand. Anything beyond that the objection is sustained, and the jury will disregard any information beyond that.

RP 93.

C. ARGUMENT

I. GROTHAUS WAS DENIED A FAIR TRIAL DUE TO A WITNESS' EXPLICIT COMMENT ON HIS GUILT.

A defendant's right to a fair trial under the Sixth Amendment and article I, section 21 of the Washington Constitution is violated when a witness is permitted to express his or her opinion as to guilt. State v. Kirkman, 159 Wn.2d 918, 927-28, 155 P.3d 125 (2007); State v. Johnson, 152 Wn. App. 924, 931-35, 219 P.3d 958 (2009).

"Opinions on guilt are improper whether made directly or by inference." State v. Quaale, 182 Wn. 2d 191, 199, 340 P.3d 213, 217 (2014).

As the Washington Supreme Court has held, it is "clearly inappropriate" for the State to offer opinion testimony in a criminal trial that amounts to an expression of personal belief as to the guilt of the defendant. State v. Montgomery, 163 Wn.2d 577, 591, 183 P.3d 267 (2008) (citation omitted). Such an opinion is not helpful to the jury and is highly prejudicial; thus it offends both constitutional principles and the rules of evidence. Id. at 591, n. 5; State v. Black, 109 Wn.2d 336, 348, 745 P.2d 12 (1987).

Here, the State conceded, and the trial court accepted, that Joe's testimony was an improper comment on guilt. RP 91. The prosecutor acknowledged he violated a pretrial order by not informing Joe regarding the prohibition on comments on guilt. RP 90. The key question on appeal is whether the trial court's remedy for these violations was sufficient to assure Grothaus a constitutionally fair trial. As explained below, it was not.

An explicit comment on guilt is a serious trial defect because it invades the province of the jury. The evil sought to be avoided by prohibiting a witness from expressing an opinion as to the

defendant's guilt or innocence is having that witness tell the jury what result to reach rather than allowing the jury to make an independent evaluation of the facts. 5A K. Tegland, Wash.Prac., Evidence, § 309, at 470 (3d ed. 1989). The remedy here did not do anything to address this type of damage to the trial process.

Simply telling the jury disregard an explicit comment on guilt is not particularly effective when it is not accompanied by the judge's explicit clarification of the jury's role and a reminder that it is to determine guilt independently. Such clarification is necessary because a direct comment on guilt is powerful and conveys more than just the words. Here, the improper opinion came from the victim who was also testifying as to whether Grothaus, as an employee, was authorized to use tools in a certain way. He said the way Grothaus used the tools constituted theft. It would have been easy for the jury to be swayed by Joe's conviction that Grothaus was guilty. Even though the jury was told to disregard the literal statement regarding guilt (as instructed), the jury was still left with the strong impression that Joe was an authority on the proper use of the tools and he knew the defendant was guilty.

What the jury needed to hear – in conjunction with the instruction that was actually given – was a reminder about its role in

the trial process. At the moment of the trial error, the trial court needed to remind the jury that it was to independently determine guilt and that it was its duty alone to do so regardless of what Joe or any witness thought about it. That is the type of instruction that is needed to address the damage done when a witness explicitly comments on a defendant's guilt. No such instruction was given here. As such, the remedy was insufficient to cure the damage to the trial process done by Joe's explicit comment on guilt. Hence, this Court should find appellant was denied a fair trial and reverse the conviction.

II. RCW 43.43.7541 AND RCW 7.68.035 ARE UNCONSTITUTIONAL AS APPLIED TO DEFENDANTS WHO DO NOT HAVE THE ABILITY, OR LIKELY FUTURE ABILITY, TO PAY LFOS.

RCW 9.94A.760 permits the trial court to impose costs "authorized by law" when sentencing an offender for a felony. RCW 43.43.7541 authorizes the collection of a $100 DNA-collection fee. RCW 7.68.035 provides that a $500 VPA "shall be imposed" upon anyone who has been found guilty in a Washington Superior court. However, these statutes violate substantive due process when applied to defendants, like Grothaus, who are not shown to have the ability or likely future ability to pay the fine.

Hence, this Court should find the trial court erred in imposing these fees without first determining Grothaus' ability to pay.

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. amends. V, XIV, § 1; 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, 1225 (2013) (citing Russell W. Galloway, Jr., Basic Substantive Due Process Analysis, 26 U.S.F. L.Rev. 625, 625–26 (1992)).

The level of review applied to a substantive due process challenge depends on the nature of the right affected. Johnson v.

Washington Dep't of Fish & Wildlife, 175 Wn. App. 765, 775, 305 P.3d 1130, 1135 (2013). Where a fundamental right is not at issue, as is the case here, the 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. Indeed, 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 the 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.

Turning first to RCW 43.43.7541, the statute mandates all felony defendants pay the DNA-collection fee. This ostensibly serves the State's 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. However, the imposition of this mandatory fee upon defendants who cannot pay the fee does not rationally serve that interest.

As for RCW 7.68.035, it mandates that all convicted defendants pay a $500 VPA. This ostensibly serves the State's interest in funding "comprehensive programs to encourage and facilitate testimony by the victims of crimes and witnesses to crimes." RCW 7.68.035(4). Again, while this may be a legitimate interest, there is nothing reasonable about requiring sentencing courts to impose the VPA upon defendants regardless of whether they have the ability – or likely future ability – to pay.

Imposing these fees does not further the State's interest in funding DNA collection or victim-focused programs. For as the Washington Supreme Court recently emphasized, "the state cannot collect money from defendants who cannot pay." Blazina, 344 P.3d at 684. Hence, there is no legitimate economic incentive served in imposing these LFOs.

Likewise, the State's interest in enhancing offender accountability is also not served by requiring a defendant to pay

mandatory LFOs when he does not have the ability to do so. In order to foster accountability, a sentencing condition must be something that is achievable in the first place. If it is not, the condition actually undermines efforts to hold a defendant answerable.

The Supreme Court also recognized that the State's interest in deterring crime via enforced LFOs is actually undermined when LFOs are imposed on people who do not have the ability to pay. Id. This is because imposing LFOs upon a person who does not have the ability to pay actually "increase[s] the chances of recidivism." Id. at 836-37 (citing relevant studies and reports).

Likewise, the State's interest in uniform sentencing is not served by imposing mandatory LFOs on those who do not have the ability to pay. This is because defendants who cannot pay are subject to an undeterminable length of involvement with the criminal justice system and often end up paying considerably more than the original LFOs imposed (due to interest and collection fees), and in turn, considerably more than their wealthier counterparts. Id. at 836-37.

When applied to indigent defendants, not only do the so-called mandatory fees ordered under RCW 43.43.7541 and RCW

7.68.035 fail to further the State's interest, they are utterly pointless. It is simply irrational for the State to mandate trial courts impose this debt upon defendants who cannot pay.

In response, the State may argue appellant's due process challenge is foreclosed by the Washington Supreme Court's rulings in State v. Curry, 118 Wn.2d 911, 829 P.2d 166 (1992) and State v. Blank, 131 Wn.2d 230, 930 P.2d 1213 (1997), which conclude due process was not violated with the imposition of the VPA regardless of whether there was an ability-to-pay inquiry. However, the "constitutional principles" at issue in those cases were considerably different than those implicated here. Hence, any reliance on these cases would be misplaced.

Grothaus' constitutional challenge to the statute authorizing the DNA-collection fee and VPA is fundamentally different from that raised in Curry. In Curry, 118 Wn.2d at 917, the defendants challenged the constitutionality of a mandatory LFO order on the ground that its enforcement might operate unconstitutionally by permitting defendants to be imprisoned merely because they are unable to pay LFOs. Hence, Curry's constitutional challenge was grounded in the well-established constitutional principle that due

process does not tolerate the incarceration of people simply because they are poor. Id.

By contrast, Grothaus asserts there is no legitimate state interest in requiring sentencing courts to impose a mandatory DNA-collection fee without the State first establishing the defendant's ability to pay. In other words, rather than challenging the constitutionality of the LFO statute based on the fundamental unfairness of its ultimate enforcement potential (as was the case in Curry and Blank), Grothaus challenges the statute as an unconstitutional exercise of the State's regulatory power that is irrational when applied to defendants who have not been shown to have the ability to pay. As such, the holdings in Curry and Blank do not control.

The State's reliance on Curry and Blank would also be misplaced because when those cases are read carefully and considered in the light of the realities of Washington's current LFO collection scheme, they actually support Grothaus' position that an ability-to-pay inquiry must occur at the time the any LFO is imposed. Indeed, after Blazina's recognition of the Washington State's "broken LFO system," 182 Wn.2d at 835, the Washington

Supreme Court's holdings in Curry and Blank must be revisited in the context of Washington's current LFO scheme.

Currently, Washington's laws set forth an elaborate and aggressive collections process which includes the immediate assessment of interest, enforced collections via wage garnishment, payroll deductions, and wage assignments (which include further penalties), and potential arrest. It is a vicious cycle of penalties and sanctions that has devastating effects on the persons involved in the process and, often, their families. See, Alexes Harris et al., Drawing Blood from Stones: Legal Debt and Social Inequality in the Contemporary United States, 115 Am. J. Soc. 1753, (2010) (reviewing the LFO cycle in Washington and its damaging impact on those who do not have the ability to pay).

Washington's legislatively sanctioned debt cycle does not conform to the necessary constitutional safeguards established in Blank. In Blank, the Washington Supreme Court held that "monetary assessments which are mandatory may be imposed against defendants without a per se constitutional violation." Blank, 131 Wn.2d at 240 (emphasis added). The Court reasoned that fundamental fairness concerns only arise if the government seeks to enforce collection of the assessment and the defendant is

unable, though no fault of his own, to comply. Id. at 241 (referring to Curry, 118 Wn.2d at 917-18).

The Washington Supreme Court also noted, however, that the constitutionality of Washington's LFO statutes was dependent on trial courts conducting an ability-to-pay inquiry at certain key times. It emphasized the following triggers for this inquiry:

- "The relevant time [to conduct an ability-to-pay inquiry] is the point of collection and when sanctions are sought for nonpayment." Id. at 242.

- "[I]f the State seeks to impose some additional penalty for failure to pay...ability to pay must be considered at that point. Id.

- "[B]efore enforced collection or any sanction is imposed for nonpayment, there must be an inquiry into ability to pay." Id.

Blank thus makes clear that in order for Washington's LFO system to pass constitutional muster, the courts must conduct an ability-to-pay inquiry before: (1) the State engages in any "enforced" collection; (2) any additional "penalty" for nonpayment is assessed; or (3) any other "sanction" for nonpayment is imposed.[2] Id.

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[2] "Penalty" means: "a sum of money which the law exacts payment of by way of punishment for... not doing some act which is required to be done." Black's Law Dictionary, Sixth Edition, at 1133.

Given Washington's current LFO collection scheme, the only way to regularly comply with Blank's safeguards is for sentencing courts to conduct a meaningful ability-to-pay inquiry at the time the VPA or DNA-collection fee is imposed. Although Blank says that prior case law suggests that such an inquiry is not required at sentencing, the Supreme Court was not confronted with the realities of the State's current collection scheme in that case. As shown below, Washington's LFO collection scheme provides for immediate enforced collection processes, penalties, and sanctions. Consequently, Blank actually supports the requirement that sentencing courts conduct an ability-to-pay inquiry during sentencing when the VPA or DNA-collection fee is imposed.

First, under RCW 10.82.090(1), LFOs accrue interest at a compounding rate of 12 percent – an astounding level given the historically low interests rates of the last several years. Blazina,

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"Sanction" means: "Penalty or other mechanism of enforcement used to provide incentives for obedience with the law or with rules and regulations." Id., at 1341.

"Enforce" means: "To put into execution, to cause to take effect, to make effective; as to enforce ... the collection of a debt or a fine." Id. at 528.

182 Wn. 2d at 836 (citing Travis Stearns, Legal Financial Obligations: Fulfilling the Promise of Gideon by Reducing the Burden, 11 Seattle J. Soc. Just. 963, 967 (2013). Interest on LFOs accrues from the date of judgment. RCW 10.82.090. This sanction has been identified as particularly invidious because it further burdens people who do not have the ability to pay with mounting debt and ensnarls them in the criminal justice system for what might be decades. See, Harris, supra at 1776-77 (explaining that "those who make regular payments of $50 a month toward a typical legal debt will remain in arrears 30 years later). Yet, there is no requirement for the court to have conducted an inquiry into ability to pay before interest is assessed.

Washington law also permits courts to order a "payroll deduction." RCW 9.94A.760(3). This can be done immediately upon sentencing. RCW 9.94A.760(3). Beyond the actual deduction to cover the outstanding LFO payment, employers are authorized to deduct other fees from the employee's earnings. RCW 9.94A.7604(4). This constitutes an enforced collection process with an additional sanction. Yet, there is no provision requiring an ability-to-pay inquiry before this collection mechanism is used.

Additionally, Washington law permits garnishment of wages and wage assignments to effectuate payment of outstanding LFOs. RCW 6.17.020; RCW 9.94A.7701; see also, Harris, supra, at 1778 (providing examples of wage garnishment as an enforcement mechanism used in Washington). As for garnishment, this enforced collection may begin immediately after the judgment is entered. RCW 6.17.020. Wage assignment is a collection mechanism that may be used within 30 days of a defendant's failure to pay the monthly sum ordered. RCW 9.94A.7701. Again, employers are permitted to charge a "processing fee." RCW 9.94A.7705. Contrary to Blank, however, there are no provisions requiring courts to conduct an ability-to-pay inquiry prior to the use of these enforced collection mechanisms.

Washington law also permits courts to use collections agencies or county collection services to actively collect LFOs. RCW 36.18.190. Any penalties or additional fees these agencies decide to assess are paid by the defendant. Id. There is nothing in the statute that prohibits the courts from using collections services immediately after sentencing. Yet, there is no requirement that an ability-to-pay inquiry occur before court clerks utilize this mechanism of enforcement. Id.

The examples set forth above show that under Washington's currently "broken" LFO system, there are many instances where the Legislature provides for "enforced collection" and/or additional sanctions or penalties without first requiring an ability-to-pay inquiry. Some of these collection mechanisms may be used immediately after the judgment and sentence is entered. If the constitutional requirements set forth in Curry and Blank are to be met, trial courts must conduct a thorough ability-to-pay inquiry at the time of sentencing when the LFOs are imposed. As such, any reliance on holdings of Curry and Blank by the State would be specious because Washington's current LFO system does not meet the constitutional safeguards mandated in those holdings.

In sum, Washington's LFO system is broken in part because the courts have not followed through with the constitutional requirement that LFOs only be imposed upon those that have the ability – or likely ability – to pay. It is not rational to impose a fee upon a person who does not have the ability to pay. Hence, when applied to defendants such as Grothaus who do not have the ability to pay LFOs, the mandatory imposition of the DNA-collection fee and VPA does not reasonably relate to the State interests served by those statutes. Consequently, this Court should find RCW

43.43.7541 and RCW 7.68.035 violate substantive due process and vacate the LFO order.

III. THE LFO ORDER SHOULD BE STRICKEN BECAUSE THE TRIAL COURT FAILED TO COMPLY WITH RCW 10.01.160(3).

RCW 10.01.160(3) permits the sentencing court to order an offender to pay LFOs, but only if the trial court has first considered his individual financial circumstances and concluded he has the ability.[3] As noted above, the record shows Grothaus was unemployed and indigent, but the trial court imposed legal financial obligations with no analysis of ability to pay. The judgment and sentence includes a boilerplate finding that "the defendant has the present or likely future ability to pay the legal financial obligation imposed." CP 15. Yet, the parties and the court did not discuss this finding at all. 8RP. As such, the trial court did not comply with RCW 10.01.160(3) and the LFO order should be stricken.

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[3] RCW 10.01.160(3) provides: "The court shall not order a defendant to pay costs unless the defendant is or will be able to pay them. In determining the amount and method of payment of costs, the court shall take account of the financial resources of the defendant and the nature of the burden that payment of costs will impose."

The Supreme Court recently emphasized that "a trial court has a statutory obligation to make an individualized inquiry into a defendant's current and future ability to pay before the court imposes LFOs." Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 827. There is good reason for this requirement. Imposing LFOs on indigent defendants causes significant problems, including "increased difficulty in reentering society, the doubtful recoupment of money by the government, and inequities in administration." Id. at 835. LFOs accrue interest at a rate of 12%, so even a person who manages to pay $25 per month toward LFOs will owe the state more money 10 years after conviction than when the LFOs were originally imposed. Id. at 836. In turn, this causes background checks to reveal an "active record," producing "serious negative consequences on employment, on housing, and on finances." Id. at 837; All of these problems lead to increased recidivism. Blazina, 182 Wn.2d at 837. Thus, a failure to consider a defendant's ability to pay not only violates the plain language of RCW 10.01.160(3), but also contravenes the purposes of the Sentencing Reform Act, which include facilitating rehabilitation and preventing reoffending. See RCW 9.94A.010.

The State may argue that the court properly imposed these costs without regard to Grothaus' poverty, because these are so-called "mandatory" LFOs and the authorizing statutes use the word "shall" or "must." RCW 7.68.035; RCW 43.43.7541; State v. Lundy, 176 Wn. App. 96, 102-03, 308 P.3d 755 (2013). However, these statutes must be read in tandem with RCW 10.01.160(3), which, as explained above, requires courts to inquire about a defendant's financial status and refrain from imposing costs on those who cannot pay. Read together, these statutes mandate imposition of the above fees upon those who can pay, and require that they not be ordered for indigent defendants. See, State v. Jones, 172 Wn.2d 236, 243, 257 P.3d 616 (2011) (explaining that statutes must be read together to achieve a harmonious total statutory scheme).

When the legislature means to depart from a presumptive process, it makes the departure clear. The restitution statute, for example, not only states that restitution "shall be ordered" for injury or damage absent extraordinary circumstances, but also states that "the court may not reduce the total amount of restitution ordered because the offender may lack the ability to pay the total amount." RCW 9.94A.753 (emphasis added). This clause is absent from

other LFO statutes, indicating that sentencing courts are to consider ability to pay in those contexts. See, State v. Conover, Wn.2d__, 355 P.3d 1093, 1097 (2015) (the legislature's choice of different language in different provisions indicates a different legislative intent).[4]

Although Curry states the VPA was mandatory notwithstanding a defendant's inability to pay, as explained above, it was only presented with the argument that the VPA was unconstitutional. Curry, 118 Wn.2d at 917-18. In the context of that argument, the Court simply assumed that the statute mandated imposition of the penalty on indigent and solvent defendants alike: "The penalty is mandatory. In contrast to RCW 10.01.160, no provision is made in the statute to waive the penalty for indigent defendants." Id. at 917 (citation omitted). That portion of the opinion is arguable dictum because it does not appear petitioners argued that RCW 10.01.160(3) applies to the VPA, but simply

[4] The legislature did amend the DNA statute to remove consideration of "hardship" at the time the fee is imposed. Compare RCW 43.43.7541 (2002) with RCW 43.43.7541 (2008). But it did not add a clause precluding waiver of the fee for those who cannot pay it at all. In other words, the legislature did not explicitly exempt this statute from the requirements of RCW 10.01.160(3).

assumed it did not. Moreover, it does not appear that the Supreme Court has ever held that the DNA fee is exempt from the ability-to-pay inquiry.

In response, the State may argue that this issue has been waived and should not be considered for the first time on appeal. Even though defense counsel did not object to the imposition of these LFOs below, this Court has the discretion to reach this error consistent with RAP 2.5. Id. at 681. As shown below, given the trial court's failure to conduct any semblance of an inquiry into Grothaus' ability to pay and given his indigent status, this Court should exercise its discretion under RAP 2.5(a) and consider the issue.

First, Blazina provides compelling policy reasons why trial courts must undertake a meaningful inquiry into an indigent defendant's ability to pay at the time of sentencing and why, if that is not done, the problem should be addressed on direct appeal. The Supreme Court discussed in detail how erroneously imposed LFOs haunt those who cannot pay, not only impacting their ability to successfully exit the criminal justice system but also limiting their employment, housing and financial prospects for many years beyond their original sentence. Blazina, 344 P.3d at 683-85.

Considering these circumstances, the Supreme Court concluded that indigent defendants who are saddled with wrongly imposed LFOs have many "reentry difficulties" that ultimately work against the State's interest in reducing recidivism. Id.

As a matter of public policy, courts must do more to make sure improperly imposed LFOs are quickly corrected. As Blazina shows, the remission process is not an effective vehicle to alleviate the harsh realities recognized in that decision. Instead, correction upon remand is a far more reasonable approach from a public policy standpoint.

Second, there is a practical reason why appellate courts should exercise discretion and consider, on direct appeal, whether the trial court complied with RCW 10.01.160(3). As the Supreme Court recognized in Blazina, the fact is "the state cannot collect money from defendants who cannot pay." Id. at 684. There is nothing reasonable about 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. Remanding back to the same sentencing judge who is already familiar with the case so he may actually make the ability-to-pay inquiry is more efficient, saving the

defendant and the State from a wasted layer of administrative and judicial process.

Finally, the erroneous ability-to-pay finding entered here is representative of a systemic problem that requires a systemic response. Unquestionably, the trial court erred in imposing discretionary LFOs without making any inquiry into Grothaus' ability to pay. The Supreme Court has held that "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 a court may impose legal financial obligations. Id. at 685. This did not happen.

The pre-formatted language used here, and in the majority of courts around the state, is simply inadequate to meet the requirements of RCW 10.01.160 (3). The systemic misuse of this boilerplate finding requires a systemic response. Part of this response must come from appellate courts through the immediate rejection of such boilerplate and remand for the trial court to follow the law. For these reasons, this Court should exercise its discretion and consider the merits of Grothaus' challenge.

In sum, RCW 10.01.160(3) requires that the trial court conduct an ability-to-pay inquiry for all LFOs. While other statutes

purport to impose mandatory fees, these must be harmonized with RCW 10.01.160(3). As such, unless the statute specifically says that an LFO must be paid regardless of a defendant's financial situation, there must be an ability-to-pay inquiry. Consequently, this Court should exercise its discretion, consider the issue, and remand with instructions that the sentencing court conduct a meaningful, on-the-record inquiry into Grothaus' ability to pay LFOs.

D. CONCLUSION

For reasons stated above, this Court should find appellant was denied a fair trial due to an explicit comment on guilt made by a State witness. Alternatively, this Court should strike the trial court's order that Grothaus pay LFOs and remand for a hearing on his ability to pay.

Dated this 15TH day of October, 2015.

Respectfully submitted

NIELSEN, BROMAN & KOCH

JENNIFER L. DOBSON,
WSBA 30487

DANA M. NELSON, WSBA 28239
Office ID No. 91051
Attorneys for Appellant

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

STATE OF WASHINGTON	)	
	)	
Respondent,	)	
	)	
vs.	)	COA NO. 73562-4-I
	)	
KEVIN GROTHAUS,	)	
	)	
Appellant.	)	

DECLARATION OF SERVICE

I, PATRICK MAYOVSKY, DECLARE UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON THAT THE FOLLOWING IS TRUE AND CORRECT:

THAT ON THE 15TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 2015, I CAUSED A TRUE AND CORRECT COPY OF THE **BRIEF OF APPELLANT** TO BE SERVED ON THE PARTY / PARTIES DESIGNATED BELOW BY DEPOSITING SAID DOCUMENT IN THE UNITED STATES MAIL.

[X] KEVIN GROTHAUS
12904 44TH AVE SE
EVERETT, WA 98208

SIGNED IN SEATTLE WASHINGTON, THIS 15TH DAY OF OCTOBER 2015.

X Patrick Mayovsky