IN THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Petitioner,

v. CASE NO. 78,902

CHARLES R. CARTER,

Respondent.

RESPONDENT'S BRIEF ON THE MERITS

NANCY A. DANIELS
PUBLIC DEFENDER
SECOND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

STEVEN A. ROTHENBURG
ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER
LEON COUNTY COURTHOUSE
FOURTH FLOOR NORTH
301 SOUTH MONROE STREET
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32301
(904) 488-2458

ATTORNEY FOR RESPONDENT
FLA. BAR NO. 0747815

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CITATIONS

STATUTES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

STATE OF FLORIDA,	:	
Petitioner,	:	
v.	:	CASE NO. 78,902
CHARLES R. CARTER,	:	
Respondent.	:	
	:	

RESPONDENT'S BRIEF ON THE MERITS

I PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The state has petitioned for review of Carter v. State, ___ So.2d ___, 16 FLW D2535 (Fla. 1st DCA October 4, 1991), in which the district court certified the question it had previously certified in Barnes v. State, 576 So.2d 758 (Fla. 1st DCA 1991) (en banc), review pending no. 77,751, holding that the habitual offender requirement of two prior felony convictions was not satisfied when both prior convictions occurred on the same day. The court followed the general rule which requires that the prior convictions be sequential and reversed the habitual offender sentence.

The record on appeal will be referred to as "R" and the transcript as "T."

II STATEMENT OF THE CASE AND FACTS

Respondent accepts the state's statement as reasonably accurate.

III SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Habitual offender statutes in Florida have been construed with a judicial gloss requiring that the prior convictions be sequential.

The district courts of appeal have held that the sequentiality requirement remains. The state disagrees with those decisions, arguing that the statutory language does not require that prior convictions be in sequence.

The state's position is flawed for two related reasons. First, the legislature is presumed to know of existing laws and their judicial interpretation. Second, when the legislature intends to overturn long-standing precedent and the construction that the courts placed on the statute, it is obliged to use unmistakable language to achieve this objective. Since the habitual offender statute was essentially silent on the sequentiality rule, the legislature did not abrogate it. Without unmistakable language overturning the rule, and there was none, it stands.

Carter had three prior felony convictions which were entered on the same day, and therefore he did not qualify as an habitual offender. This court should approve the decision of the First District Court of Appeal and answer the certified question in the affirmative.

IV ARGUMENT

CERTIFIED QUESTION/ISSUE PRESENTED

WHETHER SECTION 775.084(1)(a)1, FLORIDA STATUTES (1989), WHICH DEFINES HABITUAL FELONY OFFENDERS AS THOSE WHO HAVE "PREVIOUSLY BEEN CONVICTED OF TWO OR MORE FELONIES," REQUIRES THAT EACH OF THE FELONIES BE COMMITTED AFTER CONVICTION FOR THE IMMEDIATELY PREVIOUS OFFENSE?

The debate boils down to this: To prove habitual offender status, the state must establish two prior felony convictions. A line of cases, based on two main decisions discussed infra, and referred to as the Joyner-Shead rule requires that the second felony occur after conviction of the first felony, that is, sequentially. Joyner v. State, 30 So.2d 304 (Fla. 1947); Shead v. State, 367 So.2d 264 (Fla. 3d DCA 1979).

The First District, ruled that the Joyner-Shead principle survived long after repeal of the two-tiered provision, and concluded that "[h]ad the legislature intended to overturn long-standing precedent and the construction that the courts had placed on the statute, then it was obliged to use unmistakable language to achieve its objective." Barnes, 576 So.2d 758, 761 (Fla. 1st DCA 1991) (en banc), review pending, no. 77,751.

The legislature did not create a new habitual offender statute. Rather, it amended an existing statute. The legislature's actions must be interpreted taking into account how this court and the district courts interpreted prior versions of the habitual offender statute. The cases cited by the state do not address this situation. Instead, the state's

tunnel-visioned presentation looks only at the stark words of the law, without acknowledging historical precedent.

The background of the sequential conviction requirement is critical and revealing. Joyner v. State, supra, is the leading case. At the time Joyner was decided, the statute provided in part that "a person who, after having been three times convicted ... of felonies," shall be sentenced upon conviction for a fourth or subsequent felony as an habitual offender. Section 775.10, Fla. Stat. (1941). This court held that three prior convictions entered on the same day did not qualify as the three prior felonies required by the statute. The court said:

> To constitute ... a fourth conviction within the purview of ... Sec. 775.10, supra, the information or indictment must allege and the evidence must show that the offense charged in each information subsequent to the first was committed and the conviction therefor was had after the date of the then last preceding conviction. In other words, the second conviction must be alleged and proved to have been for a crime committed after the first conviction. The third conviction must be alleged and proved to have been for a crime committed after both the first and second convictions, and the fourth conviction must be alleged and proved to have been for a crime committed after each of the preceding three convictions. (emphasis added)

30 So.2d at 306.

The court's rationale in Joyner was:

> (1) because the purpose of the statute is to protect society from habitual criminals who persist in the commission of crime after having been theretofore convicted and punished for crimes previously committed. It is contemplated that an opportunity for

> reformation is to be given after each conviction. (2) This construction is implicit in the statutes. (emphasis added)

Id.

The court did not base its holding on the precise language of the statute, but instead canvassed decisions of other jurisdictions and decided "that a majority of the courts and the weight of authority supports this conclusion." Id.

An annotation entitled Habitual Criminal Statutes, 24 ALR 2d 1247 (1952), confirms the court's analysis:

> [R]egardless of the differences in phraseology, the preponderance of authority supports the view that the prior convictions, in order to be available for imposition of increased punishment of one as a habitual offender, must precede the commission of the principal offense, that is, the latest prosecution in point of time. In this connection it has been brought out in numerous cases that, although differing somewhat in language, the same principle is inherent in a habitual offender criminal statute, namely, that the legislature in enacting such a statute intended it to serve as a warning to first offenders and to afford them an opportunity to reform, and that the reason for the infliction of a severer punishment for a repetition of offenses is not so much that defendant has sinned more than once as that he is deemed incorrigible when he persists in violations of the law after conviction of previous infractions. (emphasis added)

Id. at 1248-49.

Since Joyner, this court consistently applied this rationale to habitual offender statutes. E.g., Lovett v. Cochran, 137 So.2d 572 (Fla. 1962) (when two of the four convictions were for offenses committed the same day they did

not count as separate prior convictions); Scott v. Mayo, 32 So.2d 821 (Fla. 1947) (two convictions entered on same date, therefore "only one of these two convictions could be counted in arriving at the number of convictions ...").

This court later held that an information charging the defendant as a fourth offender was deficient "because we have repeatedly held that when two of the four convictions required to invoke the statute are shown to have been obtained the same day, the invalidity of the information to allege facts justifying [an enhanced] sentence is obvious." Perry v. Mayo, 72 So.2d 382, 383 (Fla. 1954).

Application of that rule did not depend on whether the simultaneously imposed sentences were for crimes committed on the same day or different days. In Perry, the court was unable to ascertain the date that any of the four offenses were committed. The pivotal fact, however, was that conviction for the last two offenses occurred on the same day. For that reason the allegation of four prior convictions was facially insufficient. The court said, "To end the confusion, once and for all, we adhere to the rule that in order to form a basis for sentence as a second or fourth offender, it must be established that offenses after the primary one were in each case committed subsequent to conviction for the preceding offense...." 72 So.2d at 384 (emphasis added).

The district courts applied the same principle to the revised habitual offender statutes. In Shead v. State, supra, the court ruled that simultaneous convictions of two

misdemeanors committed on the same day did not meet the statutory requirement of "twice previously been convicted of a misdemeanor". Following this court's teaching in Joyner, the Third District Court said:

> Under this and similar habitual criminal statutes, it is the established law of this state, as well as the overwhelming weight of authority throughout the country, that, when the statute requires two or more convictions as a prerequisite to an enhanced sentence on a present case, the defendant must have committed the second offense subsequent to his conviction on the first offense. Two or more prior convictions rendered on the same day are, therefore, treated as one offense for purposes of such a provision in a habitual criminal statute.
>
> * * *
>
> It therefore follows that the requirement of two prior misdemeanor or qualified offense convictions under the habitual criminal statute means that the defendant must have committed the second offense subsequent to his conviction on the first offense and thus showed a persistence in a pattern of crime notwithstanding an opportunity to reform. (emphasis added)

367 So.2d at 266-267.

In Snowden v. State, 449 So.2d 332, 338 (Fla. 5th DCA 1984), quashed on other grounds 476 So.2d 191 (Fla. 1985), the Fifth District said that, "although the current statute differs somewhat in its operative language from the earlier version, we see nothing in it that expresses a purpose other than was earlier noted by this court in Joyner, viz., to protect society from habitual criminals who persist in the commission of crime

after having been theretofore convicted and to permit an opportunity for reform after each conviction" (emphasis added).

In Wilken v. State, 531 So.2d 1011 (Fla. 4th DCA 1988), an habitual misdemeanant sentence was reversed because, both prior offenses occurred before the defendant was convicted of either crime. The court followed the rationale of Joyner and Shead, which had applied "the same gloss" on other versions of the habitual offender laws by finding that "the timing requirement is implicit in the statutes...." Id.

Later, the Third District in Shead decided that the sequentiality requirement was also a part of the habitual felony offender statute, which by then was not a two-tiered system. A person qualified merely if he had "twice previously been convicted of a misdemeanor..." section 775.084(1)(a)(1)(b), Fla. Stat. (1975).

Presently, the statute applies when the defendant "has previously been convicted of two or more felonies." This language is remarkably similar to the fourth conviction requirement in old section 775.10, which read, "after having been three times convicted." This present language is not greatly different from the "twice previously convicted" language of the former section 775.084.

The present habitual offender statute was not intended to change the historical "gloss" which the courts have uniformly applied to enhancement statutes over the years. The general purpose of habitual offender statutes, rather than their

individual wording, has been and should continue to be, the rationale of interpretation.

Further, two well-established rules of statutory construction are important. First, when enacting a statute, the legislature is presumed to know the existing law, and also to "be acquainted with judicial decisions on the subject concerning which it subsequently enacts a statute." Ford v. Wainwright, 451 So.2d 471, 475 (Fla. 1984); Williams v. Jones, 326 So.2d 425, 435 (Fla. 1975), appeal dism. 429 U.S. 803, 97 S.Ct. 34, 50 L.Ed.2d 63 (1976); Bermudez v. Florida Power and Light Co., 433 So.2d 565, 567 (Fla. 3d DCA 1983), review den. 444 So.2d 416 (Fla. 1984).

Second, when the legislature intends to overturn longstanding court interpretation of law, it must do so in unmistakable terms. State ex rel. Housing Authority of Plant City v. Kirk, 231 So.2d 522, 524 (Fla. 1970); American Motors Corp. v. Abrahantes, 474 So.2d 271, 274 (Fla. 3d DCA 1985).

Plant City involved a question whether an amended excise tax statute was intended to tax rental properties owned by public housing authorities. From 1949 to 1968, public housing authorities clearly were not subject to excise taxes. This was due to an interpretation of the Revenue Act by the Department of Revenue that applied from 1949 to 1959, and due to the decision of this court in Green v. Panama City Housing Authority, 115 So.2d 560, 562 (Fla. 1959), for the balance of the period. In 1968, the legislature amended the revenue statutes to expand the definition of businesses which were

subject to the excise tax. On appeal, the Department of Revenue argued that public housing authorities came within the expanded definition of businesses and, thus, were subject to excise taxes.

This court said:

> Inherent in the argument of the Department of Revenue is that the exemption granted to the Housing Authority in Chapter 423 was repealed by implication by the 1968 amendment to the Revenue Act, thus rendering the Panama City cases and the exemption granted - now inoperable.

Plant City, 231 So.2d at 523. The court continued, thus:

> We cannot say that the Department's argument is not persuasive, but, in a situation such as this - with such long standing recognition of such exemption by both the Legislature, this Court, the district court and the circuit court - we are not persuaded that such a catyclysmic [sic] result could be brought about by the application of the principle of implied repeal.

Id.

This court further held that "[w]here an act purports to overturn long-standing legal precedent and completely change the construction placed on a statute by the courts, it is not too much to require that it be done in unmistakable language." Id.

American Motors, supra, concerned the retroactivity of a long-arm statute. The Third District noted a long line of cases which held that amendments to long-arm statutes were not to be applied retroactively. It then noted two rules of statutory construction, the second being that, as in Plant

City, when an act purports to overturn long-standing legal precedent and change the courts' construction placed on the statute, the legislature must do so in unmistakable language. The district court said that, while the language of the amended statute may reasonably be viewed to evince a legislative intent that the 1984 amendment be applied retroactively, the act did not do so "clearly" and "unmistakably," and was therefore ineffective in doing so. 474 So.2d at 274.

Applying that rule of construction here, and considering the longstanding precedent of Joyner-Shead, if the legislature intended to eliminate the sequential conviction requirement, it was obliged to do so in unmistakable language. It did not. Therefore, Joyner-Shead should stand, until and unless the legislature makes a contrary intent unmistakably clear.

It is noteworthy that all the district courts have addressed the issue before the court, and there is no conflict among them. All those courts have agreed, either expressly or implicitly, that the Joyner-Shead rule remains viable under the habitual offender statute. Barnes v. State; Collazo v. State, 573 So.2d 209 (Fla. 3d DCA 1991); Williams v. State, 573 So.2d 451 (Fla. 4th DCA 1991); Walker v. State, 567 So.2d 546 (Fla. 2d DCA 1990); Taylor v. State, 558 So.2d 1092 (Fla. 5th DCA 1990), appeal after remand, 576 So.2d 968 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

Carter cannot be sentenced as an habitual offender because the statute requires two non-contemporaneous felony convictions. Carter's prior convictions were imposed on the same date and, thus, do not qualify.

V CONCLUSION

Based upon the foregoing argument, reasoning, and citation of authority, respondent requests that this Court answer the certified question in the affirmative and approve the decision of the First District Court of Appeal below.

Respectfully submitted,

NANCY A. DANIELS
PUBLIC DEFENDER
SECOND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

S Rothenburg

STEVEN A. ROTHENBURG
Fla. Bar No. 0747815
Assistant Public Defender
Leon County Courthouse
Fourth Floor, North
301 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
(904) 488-2458

ATTORNEY FOR RESPONDENT

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a copy of the foregoing has been furnished by hand delivery to Gypsy Bailey, Assistant Attorney General, The Capitol, Tallahassee, Florida, and a copy has been mailed to respondent, CHARLES R. CARTER, #A-204333, Jackson Correctional Institution, Post Office Box 4900, Malone, Florida 32445, on this 13th day of December, 1991.

S Rothenburg

STEVEN A. ROTHENBURG