

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA
Case No. SC10-1349

FILED
2010 JUL 14 PM 3:24
BY _____

ANTOINE BOWENS,
Petitioner,

v.

THE STATE OF FLORIDA,
Respondent.

_____ /

**STATE OF FLORIDA'S RESPONSE OPPOSING
EXPEDITED MOTION TO CONSOLIDATE CASES**

Respondent, the State of Florida, opposes the consolidation of this case with Public Defender v. State of Florida, Case No. SC09-1181, for the following reasons:

1. First, the motion for consolidation is premature because the issue of whether the Court has jurisdiction in this case is unsettled. Bowens filed a notice to invoke this Court's discretionary jurisdiction on July 12, 2010, at the same time the consolidation motions in the respective cases were filed. As a basis for this Court's jurisdiction, the notice asserts that the decision below passes upon a certified question of great public importance, expressly declares a state statute valid, and expressly affects a class of constitutional officers. Until this Court determines whether it has jurisdiction over this case, it cannot consider whether consolidation with another case is warranted.

2. Moreover, the orderly presentation of jurisdictional briefs and sufficient time to reflect on whether jurisdiction exists and should be exercised, as was done in case number SC09-1181, are warranted here. Notably, the arguments made as to the propriety of this Court's jurisdiction over the case on the basis of the certified question are not permitted. Fla. R. App. P. 9.120(d). While the notice to invoke offers alternative grounds for jurisdiction, the motion to consolidate asserts that this case is before this Court by reference only to the certified question. This Court must make its own jurisdictional decision on that issue without argument from the parties, or after the parties have an opportunity to brief the other possible grounds for jurisdiction in this Court. In either case, the question of consolidation is premature until a jurisdictional decision is made.

3. In the alternative, if the Court considers the consolidation motion and the movant's assertions on the basis of the certified question, the Court should consider whether the Third District actually "passed upon" a question of great public importance, as required for jurisdiction. Fla. R. App. P. 9.030(a)(2)(v). The Third District summarily stated that it agreed with the trial court's analysis on the constitutionality of the statute, but it is not entirely clear that it considered specifically the issue it put to this Court in its certified question: "Whether section 27.5303(1)(d), Florida Statutes, ... is unconstitutional as a violation of an indigent client's right to effective assistance of counsel and access to the courts, and a

violation of the separation of powers mandated by article II, section 3 of the Florida Constitution as legislative interference with the judiciary's inherent authority to provide counsel and the Supreme Court's exclusive control over the ethical rules governing lawyer conflicts of interest?" Because the Third District did not mention, discuss, or analyze the issues within the certified question, it is questionable whether it passed upon them. *See* Pirelli Armstrong Tire Corp. v. Jensen, 777 So. 2d 973, 974 (Fla. 2001) ("Because in rendering its decision, the Second District did not pass upon the question certified to this Court, we are without jurisdiction to review this case."); Gee v. Seidman & Seidman, 653 So. 2d 384 (Fla. 1995); *but see* Weiland v. State, 732 So. 2d 1044, 1047 (Fla. 1999).¹

4. Next, turning to the motion's substantive argument, consolidating these cases for briefing and oral argument will not necessarily promote judicial economy or efficiency because these cases do not involve identical or substantially

¹ The fact that this case is an appeal from a decision regarding a petition for writ of certiorari (on this issue, denying Bowens' cross-petition), the certified question basis for this Court's jurisdiction is further complicated. Because the writ is discretionary and denial is not construed as an opinion on the merits of a case, the Third District's brief approval of the trial court's resolution of the constitutionality of the statute could mean that it found no departure from the essential requirements of law; it could mean that the Third District concluded that there was an adequate remedy by way of appeal at the conclusion of the trial court proceedings; it could mean that the petitioner did not demonstrate the requisite degree of material harm throughout the remainder of the proceedings (a decision which does not necessarily entail findings regarding the constitutionality of the statute). Therefore, unlike the appeal in Weiland, the Third District's summary disposition of the constitutionality issue is not alone grounds for concluding that it passed on the question it certified.

the same issues. See J.M.B. v. State, 776 So. 2d 353, 354 (Fla. 1st DCA 2001) (“cases with ... identical issues may be consolidated ... for briefing.”). The petitioners in the two cases are different and a brief description of them and their arguments below exemplify why they should remain on separate tracks in this Court. In SC09-1181, the petitioner is the office of the Public Defender of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, appealing a decision in which the Third District determined that the entire public defender’s office could not withdraw from an entire class of felony cases, representing approximately 11,693 cases at that time, solely on the basis of the office’s average caseload. State v. Public Defender, Eleventh Judicial Circuit, 12 So. 3d 798, 805 (Fla. 3d DCA 2009). In contrast, here the Third District reversed the trial court’s order permitting the withdrawal of one public defender from representing Mr. Bowens (and only Mr. Bowens) because counsel had failed to show that his limitations actually prejudiced Mr. Bowens. State v. Bowens, No. 3D09-3023, at 4 (Fla. 3d DCA July 7, 2010). The Third District specifically cited its review of the record in this case as leading it “to conclude that there was no evidence of actual or imminent prejudice to Bowens’ constitutional rights.” Id.

5. Thus, one case involves a system-wide attempt to withdraw from an entire class of cases based on aggregate caseload numbers, while the other involves an individual presentation of the particularities of Mr. Bowens’ representation by

his public defender. The Third District explicitly drew this distinction in Public Defender in addressing the aggregate withdrawal sought: “The conclusion in the aggregate, that a conflict of interest exists, inherently lacks the meaningful individualized information required by such a determination.” Public Defender, 12 So. 3d at 802. The distinction between individual and aggregate withdrawal being critical to that court’s decision, it cannot be contended that the issues in these two cases are identical or sufficiently similar to warrant consolidation.

6. Consolidating these cases would lead to the type of conflation of issues that consolidation typically seeks to avoid. The issue of the constitutionality of the statute was not at issue in Public Defender, but might be present here, if the Court concludes that the Third District passed upon this issue.² In Public Defender, the Third District considered whether the public defender’s office could withdraw in the aggregate based on its caseload burden, an issue that simply could not be considered here. The particular circumstances of Mr. Bowens’ public defender were not at issue in Public Defender, and were nearly the entire basis for the lower court’s decision here. Likewise, the issue in Public Defender of whether declining representation is equivalent to withdrawal is not presented here. Given the distinct issues in each case, consolidation is unwarranted.

² At page 2 of its motion to consolidate, petitioner notes that the decision in Public Defender only implicitly addresses the statute’s constitutionality.

7. While the issues undoubtedly relate to the same subject matter, this relation is not grounds for consolidation. This case relates to Public Defender in the same way that any withdrawal by any individual public defender in Florida on the basis of a high caseload would relate. And the resolution of the system-wide issue in Public Defender by this Court has the potential to entirely moot this case or change the relevant analysis. Judicial efficiency will be better served by allowing this case to operate on a separate track.

8. Finally, consolidation would not promote the timely disposition of Public Defender, which already has a briefing schedule. That schedule necessarily would be extended significantly were consolidation of the cases ordered. Given the different factual circumstances presented, and the separate issues in each case, it makes little sense to consolidate the briefing and disposition of these cases.

For the foregoing reasons, the State respectfully requests that the Court deny Bowens' motion for consolidation.

Respectfully Submitted,

BILL McCOLLUM
ATTORNEY GENERAL

Courtney Brewer

Richard L. Polin (FBN 0230987)
Bureau Chief, Criminal Appeals
Office of the Attorney General
444 Brickell Avenue
Miami, Florida 33131
(305) 377-5441
(305) 377-5655 (fax)

Scott D. Makar (FBN 709697)
Solicitor General
Louis F. Hubener (FBN 0140084)
Chief Deputy Solicitor General
Courtney Brewer (FBN 890901)
Deputy Solicitor General
Office of the Attorney General
The Capitol, PL-01
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050
(850) 414-3681
(850) 410-2672 (fax)

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that a true copy of the foregoing has been furnished this 14th day of July, 2010, by U.S. Mail to:

PARKER D. THOMSON
ALVIN F. LINDSAY
JULIE E. NEVINS
MATTHEW R. BRAY
Hogan & Hartson LLP
Mellon Financial Center
1111 Brickell Avenue, Ste. 1900
Miami, Florida 33131

CHIEF JUDGE JOSEPH P. FARINA
Dade County Courthouse
73 West Flagler Street
Miami, Florida 33130

JUDGE STANFORD BLAKE
Richard E. Gerstein Justice Bldg.
1351 N.W. 12th Street
Miami, Florida 33125

LINDA KELLY KEARSON
General Counsel, Eleventh Jud. Cir.
Lawson E. Thomas Courthouse Ct.
175 N.W. First Avenue, 30th Floor
Miami, Florida 33128

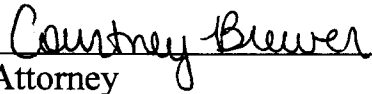
ARTHUR J. JACOBS
Jacobs & Associates, P.A.
961687 Gateway Blvd.
Suite 201-1
Fernandina Beach, Florida 32034

PENNY BRILL
DON HORN
Office of the State Attorney
E.R. Graham Building
1350 N.W. 12th Avenue
Miami, Florida 33136

JOSEPH P. GEORGE, JR.
Regional Civil and Criminal
Conflict Counsel
1501 N.W. N. River Drive
Miami, Florida 33125

STEPHEN PRESNELL
General Counsel
Justice Administration Commission
P. O. Box 1654
Tallahassee, Florida 32302

ROBERT A. YOUNG
General Counsel, 10th Jud. Cir.
P.O. Box 9000-PD
Bartow, Florida 33831-9000



Attorney