

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF GUILFORD

FILED  
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE  
SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

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97 CrS 23656, 39581  
98 CrS 23484, 99 CrS 23241-48  
GUILFORD COUNTY, C.S.C.  
Cdf

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA,

ORDER

v.

THEODORE MEAD KIMBLE,  
Defendant.

This matter is before the Court on a paper writing filed by the Clerk on October 29, 2003. It is captioned "Motion for Appropriate Relief" and is signed by the defendant acting pro se.

In the motion, the defendant alleges ineffective assistance of counsel, in that his trial lawyer promised the conspiracy charge would be dismissed pursuant to plea agreement, that his lawyer told him the reason the dismissal wasn't in the plea agreement was because the deal was secret, that the conspiracy charge was not so dismissed, and that he received an additional sentence for conspiracy; that he was tricked and deceived in unspecified ways by his attorneys into waiving indictment by the grand jury to eight counts of solicitation to commit murder which charges were not supported by any evidence other than the testimony of "a known habitual liar, thief, homosexual"; that his attorneys told him if he did not accept the plea bargain he would get the death penalty "for sure;" that one of his attorneys had a conflict of interest in that the attorney had, while serving as a judge of the Superior Court, earlier sentenced the defendant for an earlier conviction; that defendant's attorney on appeal did not raise all of these various errors before the North Carolina Court of Appeals; that his appellate counsel refused to file a Motion for Appropriate Relief on his behalf; that his attorneys failed and refused to assist him when he filed his pro se motion to withdraw his guilty plea; and that his attorneys failed to get an affidavit from defendant's "star" witness, who then disappeared after defendant's attorneys allowed the District Attorney to threaten the witness.

The defendant further alleges that the sentences imposed were illegal and unauthorized by law in unspecified ways; that the state failed to provide the defendant and the Court with the results of a pre-sentence investigation report in violation of his right to due process; that the new arson charge to which defendant pled guilty violated his right against double jeopardy, having previously been dismissed by the state; that the District Attorney threatened various witnesses for the defendant that if they testified for the defendant they would be prosecuted for other crimes, thus depriving him of key

witnesses; and that the defendant was on unspecified medication on the day he pled guilty and did not know what he was doing.

A review of the file, including the decision by the North Carolina Court of Appeals, shows the following facts of record:

1. On 7 April 1997, Defendant was indicted by a Guilford County grand jury for first-degree murder based on the death of Patricia Gail Kimble (Kimble), Defendant's wife. The indictment alleged Kimble was murdered on 9 October 1995. On 3 November 1997, Defendant was indicted for arson and conspiracy to commit first-degree murder based on the 9 October 1995 incident, and on 6 July 1998, Defendant was indicted for first-degree arson based on the 9 October 1995 incident. Finally, on 28 January 1999, the State filed bills of information charging Defendant with eight counts of solicitation to commit first-degree murder. The eight counts of solicitation to commit first-degree murder related to incidents that occurred after the 9 October 1995 death of Kimble.
2. On 25 January 1999, Defendant pled guilty to second-degree murder, conspiracy to commit first-degree murder, and first-degree arson. Defendant also pled guilty to the eight counts of solicitation to commit first-degree murder. Sentencing was continued.
3. On 26 February 1999, Defendant filed a pro se motion to withdraw his guilty pleas on the ground he was "pressured into [his] earlier plea." The trial court subsequently held a hearing on the motion. At the conclusion of the hearing, the trial court denied Defendant's motion to withdraw his guilty pleas.
4. On 4 March 1999 through 5 March 1999, the trial court held Defendant's sentencing hearing. At the conclusion of the hearing, the trial court found aggravating and mitigating factors existed as to some of the crimes. The defendant was sentenced consistently with his plea agreement.
5. Defendant thereafter filed a Notice of Appeal. The Court entered appellate entries and appointed the Appellate Defender to represent the defendant. The Court of Appeals found no error.

Based on the record, the Court concludes that:

1. A defendant who voluntarily and intelligently enters an unconditional guilty plea waives all non-jurisdictional defects in the proceeding, including constitutional violations that occurred before entry of the plea. See State v. Reynolds, 298 N.C. 380, 395, 259 S.E.2d 843, 852 (1979) ("When a criminal defendant has solemnly admitted in open court that he is in fact guilty of the offense with which he is charged, he may not thereafter raise independent claims relating to the deprivation of constitutional rights that occurred prior to the entry of the guilty.") By pleading guilty, defendant has waived his claims concerning the alleged defects in the indictment and concerning the prosecutor's conduct; as to the latter, the defendant was aware of all the facts he now claims show prosecutorial misconduct at the time he pled guilty based on the documents he provided with his motion. Moreover, when a defendant pleads guilty, the state no longer has to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt. By his plea, the defendant has waived any argument he had that the State's evidence was insufficient.

2. A person is presumed competent. "Everyone is presumed to be sane until the contrary appears." Ridings v. Ridings, 55 N.C.App. 630, 633, 286 S.E.2d 614, 616, disc. rev. denied, 305 N.C. 586 (1982). The judge who accepted defendant's guilty plea had the opportunity to examine the defendant in person, and thereafter found the defendant competent to proceed. Nothing in the defendant's motion and attachments gives rise to any question about his ability to understand the nature and object of the proceedings against him, to comprehend his own situation, or to assist counsel in a rational way. NCGS § 15A-1001. Defendant's unsupported post-conviction assertions that he was incompetent at the time of the guilty plea because he was taking medicine do not overcome the Court's properly entered findings and do not require an evidentiary hearing.

3. The record further shows that the defendant was satisfied with his attorneys when he pled guilty. The defendant at that time stated under oath that he was satisfied with his attorney's services. Moreover, the defendant has already had the opportunity for a hearing on this issue in front of the judge who accepted his guilty plea and who sentenced him, when the matter was raised by the defendant in his motion to set aside the guilty plea. Any error in that decision should have been raised on appeal. The defendant's motion does not raise a question of fact and even if it did, it is procedurally barred.

4. A guilty plea is not voluntary and intelligent unless it is "entered by one fully aware of the direct consequences, including the actual value of any commitments made to him by the court, prosecutor, or his own counsel . . .," Brady v. United States, 397 U.S. 742, 755, 25 L. Ed. 2d 747, 760 (1970) (quoting Shelton v. United States, 246 F.2d 101, 115 (5th Cir. 1957) (Tuttle, J., dissenting)); Bryant v. Cherry, 687 F.2d 48, 49 (4th Cir. 1982), cert. denied, 459 U.S. 1073, 74 L. Ed. 2d 637, and is not "the product of such factors as misunderstanding, duress, or misrepresentation by others." Blackledge v. Allison, 431 U.S. 63, 75, 52 L. Ed. 2d 136, 147-148 (1977); State v. Loye, 56 N.C. App. 501, 289 S.E.2d 870 (1982).

The defendant's claim that his lawyers told him the conspiracy charge would be dismissed is belied by the record, including his own sworn statement and his attorneys' certification. The record unambiguously reveals that the defendant was correctly informed of the applicable maximum sentence and that there was no promise made to him that the conspiracy charge would be dismissed. The defendant swore that no other promises had been made to him, and he signed a plea agreement that did not contain any other promises. State v. Wilkins, 131 N.C. App. 220 (1998) (Defendant knew or should have known that she did not have a plea agreement with the State where the defendant signed a plea transcript which detailed the charge to which she was pleading guilty but contained no plea agreement.) Moreover, he was asked in open court about his plea agreement and he did not inform the Court at that time that he had been guaranteed dismissal of the conspiracy charge and indeed specifically pled guilty to the conspiracy charge and denied that any promises other than those in the plea agreement had been made. This unambiguous record creates a "formidable barrier" to defendant's claim. Blackledge v. Allison, 431 U.S. at 73-74. Only extraordinary circumstances would

entitle defendant to relief. Blackledge v. Allison, 431 U.S. at 80 n.19. There are no such extraordinary circumstances here and absolutely no independent indicia that the defendant's claim has merit. Cf. United States v. Cervantes, 132 F.3d 1106, 1110 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1998)(must be independent indicia of the likely merit of defendant's allegations, such as one or more affidavits from reliable third parties).

5. Every criminal defendant is entitled to the effective assistance of counsel. Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668, 80 L. Ed. 2d 674, 104 S. Ct. 2052 (1984). Strickland establishes a two-prong test for ineffective assistance of counsel: first, that counsel's performance must fall below an objective standard of reasonableness, and second, that the deficient representation must be so serious as to deprive defendant of a fair trial. See State v. Braswell, 312 N.C. 553, 324 S.E.2d 241 (1985) (adopting Strickland standard for ineffective assistance claims). Here, the defendant has failed to raise any issues of material fact about his attorneys' representation or the specific effect of the alleged conflict of interest. While he has made a laundry list of allegations, they are unsupported by any competent evidence. Moreover, there has been no showing that a different result would have obtained had defense counsel handled any one of these matters differently. Finally, as noted above, the defendant stated under oath at the time of his guilty plea that he was satisfied with his attorneys and he has already had a hearing on many of the issues he raises in the Motion for Appropriate Relief when he his motion to withdraw his guilty plea was heard.

6. The sentencing report is on file herein and there is no evidence that it was not available to the trial court and to the defendant before sentencing. Even if it was not, that is not a constitutional violation.

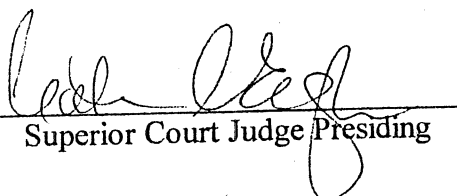
7. An attorney appointed to represent a criminal defendant on appeal has no obligation to file a Motion for Appropriate Relief on behalf of that criminal defendant.

8. There is nothing in the record to support the defendant's claims that the sentences he received are illegal. The sentences he received are valid and within the ranges allowed by the legislature for the crimes to which the defendant pled guilty.

It is therefore ORDERED that:

1. The Defendant's Motion for Appropriate Relief is DENIED.
2. The Clerk shall mail a copy of this Order to the defendant, to the District Attorney for the Eighteenth Judicial District, and to the North Carolina Department of Corrections.

This 20 day of November, 2003.

  
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Superior Court Judge Presiding