

COURT OF APPEALS
RICHLAND COUNTY, OHIO
FIFTH APPELLATE DISTRICT

MICHAEL N. JOHNSON

Petitioner-Appellee

-VS-

STATE OF OHIO

Respondent-Appellant

JUDGES:

Hon. Sheila G. Farmer, P. J.

Hon. W. Scott Gwin, J.

Hon. John W. Wise, J.

Case No. 08 CA 302

O P I N I O N

CHARACTER OF PROCEEDING:

Civil Appeal from the Court of Common
Pleas, Case No. 08 CV 922D

JUDGMENT:

Reversed and Remanded

DATE OF JUDGMENT ENTRY:

September 9, 2009

APPEARANCES:

For Petitioner-Appellee

For Respondent-Appellant

MICHAEL JOHNSON
PRO SE
MANSFIELD CORRECTIONAL INST.
Post Office Box 788
Mansfield, Ohio 44901

FRANK ARDIS, JR.
KIRSTEN PSCHOLKA-GARTNER
ASSISTANT PROSECUTORS
38 South Park
Mansfield, Ohio 44902

Wise, J.

{¶1} Respondent-Appellant, the State of Ohio, through the Richland County Prosecutor's Office, appeals the Richland County Court of Common Pleas ruling finding Senate Bill [S.B.] 10, Ohio's sexual offender classification and registration scheme, to be unconstitutional in its entirety. The relevant facts leading to this appeal are as follows.

{¶2} Via a petition filed in the Richland County Court of Common Pleas, Appellee Michael N. Johnson contested his reclassification as a Tier III sex offender under R.C. 2950.01, et seq., as amended by S.B. 10, also known as the "Adam Walsh Act" ("A.W.A."), a law which was in effect on the date the State re-classified Appellee, but which was not in effect on the date he committed the sexual offense in question. Appellee challenged the constitutionality of Ohio's S.B. 10, effective January 1, 2008, which eliminated the prior sex offender classifications and substituted a three-tier classification system based on the offense committed. Appellee argued that R.C. Chapter 2950, as amended by S.B. 10, violates the prohibition against ex post facto laws, that it violates the Ohio Constitution's prohibition against retroactive laws, that it violates the separation of powers doctrine and constitutes a double jeopardy violation, and that it violates due process.

{¶3} According to his petition, in 2006, Appellee was convicted of gross sexual imposition and rape in the Lorain County Court of Common Pleas. As a result, Appellee was classified under the pre-2008 sexual offender registration system.¹

¹ The record in the present appeal contains limited information concerning the Lorain County case.

{¶4} On or about February 27, 2008, Appellee received from the Office of the Attorney General a “Notice of New Classification and Registration Duties,” based on Ohio's Adam Walsh Act. The notice indicated that he was being reclassified accordingly.

{¶5} On April 24, 2008, Appellee timely filed a “Petition to Contest Reclassification” with the Richland County Court of Common Pleas (hereinafter “trial court”) pursuant to R.C. 2950.031(E) and 2950.032(E).

{¶6} Via an entry filed on October 10, 2008, the trial court found that Senate Bill 10 was unconstitutional both facially and as applied to Appellee because it violated the prohibitions against both retroactive and ex post facto laws. The trial court, relying upon its decision in *Sigler v. State*, Richland County Court of Common Pleas, Case No. 07 CV 1863, granted judgment in favor of Appellee.

{¶7} Appellant State of Ohio, through the Richland County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, thereupon filed a notice of appeal, raising four assignments of error.

{¶8} On January 14, 2009, this Court *sua sponte* stayed all further proceedings in this, as well as numerous other Richland County Adam Walsh cases, pending our decision in *Sigler v. State*, Richland App. No. 08-CA-79.

{¶9} On April 27, 2009, this Court reversed the trial court's decision in *Sigler*. This Court thereafter *sua sponte* assigned this case to the accelerated calendar.

{¶10} Appellant, State of Ohio, herein raises the following four Assignments of Error:

{¶11} “I. WHETHER, BEYOND A REASONABKE [SIC] DOUBT, SENATE BILL 10 AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS CITED BY THE TRIAL COURT ARE CLEARLY INCOMPATIBLE, AND WHETHER THERE IS NO SET OF

CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THE SENATE BILL 10 WOULD BE VALID. THE TRIAL COURT PURPORTED TO INVALIDATE THE LEGISLATION, RATHER THAN THE STATUTORY PROVISIONS ACTUALLY AT ISSUE IN THIS MATTER. HENCE, BY INVALIDATING THE 'ADAM WALSH ACT,' THE COURT APPARENTLY PURPORTED TO INVALIDATE EVERY STATUTE [SIC] AMENDED BY THE SB 10, DESPITE THE NARROW CLAIM BEFORE IT. THE COURT BELOW DID NOT PROPERLY APPLY, OR SUBSTANTIATE DIVERGENCE FROM, THE PRESUMPTION OF CONSTITUTIONALITY.

{¶12} "II. WHETHER SENATE BILL 10'S LEGISLATIVE ADJUSTMENT TO THE FREQUENCY AND DURATION OF APPELLE'S [SIC] PRE-EXISTING DUTY TO REGISTER RENDERED THE STATUTE UNCONSTITUTIONALLY RETROACTIVE. A STATUTE FOUND TO BE RETROACTIVE IS ONLY UNCONSTITUTIONAL IF IT SIGNIFICANTLY BURDENS A VESTED SUBSTANTIVE RIGHT, BUT NOT IF IT IS REMEDIAL. AS THE OHIO SUPREME COURT HAS CONSISTENTLY HELD UNDER THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK AMENDED BY THE SENATE BILL 10, THAT FRAMEWORK IS REMEDIAL IN NATURE. THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXPRESSED ITS INTENT THAT R.C. CHAPTER 2950, AS AMENDED, REMAIN REMEDIAL IN NATURE.

{¶13} "III. WHETHER SENATE BILL 10'S ADJUSTMENT TO THE FREQUENCY AND DURATION OF APPELLEE'S PRE-EXISTING DUTY TO REGISTER CONSTITUTED SUCCESSIVE PUNISHMENT IN VIOLATION OF THE *EX POST FACTO* CLAUSE. IT WAS, INSTEAD, A REMEDIAL, CIVIL STATUTE THAT DID

NOT IMPACT OFFENDERS' SENTENCES [SIC] FOR THE CRIMES THEY COMMITTED.

{¶14} “IV. WHETHER A PLEA AGREEMENT BETWEEN AN OFFENDER AND THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY CREATED A VESTED, SETTLED EXPECTATION THAT THE OFFENDER'S CLASSIFICATION WOULD NEVER CHANGE. THE CLASSIFICATIONS OF SB 10, AND PRIOR CLASSIFICATIONS IMPOSED PURSUANT TO STATUTE BY THE COURT, DO NOT, AND DID NOT, CREATE THE EXPECTATION THAT CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS WOULD NEVER AGAIN BE THE SUBJECT OF LEGISLATIVE ACTION.”

Standard of Review

{¶15} This case comes to us on the accelerated calendar. App.R. 11.1, which governs accelerated calendar cases, provides, in pertinent part:

{¶16} “(E) Determination and judgment on appeal. The appeal will be determined as provided by App.R. 11.1. It shall be sufficient compliance with App.R. 12(A) for the statement of the reason for the court's decision as to each error to be in brief and conclusionary form. The decision may be by judgment entry in which case it will not be published in any form.”

{¶17} One of the important purposes of accelerated calendar is to enable an appellate court to render a brief and conclusory decision more quickly than in a case on the regular calendar where the briefs, facts and legal issues are more complicated. *Crawford v. Eastland Shopping Mall Assn.* (1983), 11 Ohio App.3d 158.

I., II., & III.

{¶18} In its First, Second, and Third Assignments of Error, Appellant State of Ohio contends that the trial court erred in finding Senate Bill 10 to be unconstitutional on multiple grounds. We agree.

{¶19} This Court has examined the identical arguments that were accepted by the trial court in order to find S.B. 10 unconstitutional; we have now rejected those arguments. See *State v. Gooding*, Coshocton App. No. 08 CA 5, 2008-Ohio-5954; See also, *Sigler v. State*, Richland App. No. 08-CA-79, 2009-Ohio-2010. Virtually every Appellate District in the State of Ohio has upheld the A.W.A. against the identical challenges the trial court relied upon to find S.B. 10 unconstitutional. See, *State v. Graves*, 179 Ohio App.3d 107, 2008-Ohio-5763; *Holcomb v. State*, 3rd Dist. Nos. 8-08-23, 8-08-25, 8-08-26, 8-08-24, 2009-Ohio-782; *State v. Bodyke*, 6th Dist. Nos. H-07-040, H07-041, H07-042, 2008-Ohio-6387; *State v. Byers*, 7th Dist. No. 07CO39, 2008-Ohio-5051; *State v. Ellis*, 8th Dist. No. 90844, 2008-Ohio-6283; *State v. Honey*, 9th Dist. No. 08CA0018-M, 2008-Ohio-4943; *State v. Christian*, 10th Dist. No. 08AP-170, 2008-Ohio-6304; *State v. Swank*, 11th Dist. No. 2008-L-019, 2008-Ohio-6059; *State v. Williams*, 12th Dist. No. CA2008-02-029, 2008-Ohio-6195.

{¶20} Upon thorough review of Appellant's arguments, we shall follow the law set forth in our decisions in *Gooding* and *Sigler*. On the authority of the foregoing decisions, Appellant's First, Second and Third Assignments of Error are well taken.

IV.

{¶21} In its Fourth Assignment of Error, Appellant State of Ohio argues that the trial court erred by finding Senate Bill 10 to be unconstitutional on the basis that it

violates the right to contract pursuant to Article II, Section 28 of the Ohio Constitution.
We agree.

{¶22} Although the right to contract issue was not explicitly addressed in the trial court's entry in this particular case, we note we have previously examined this issue. See *Sigler v. State*, Richland App. No. 08-CA-79, 2009-Ohio-2010, ¶ 88. Upon thorough review of Appellant's arguments, we shall follow the law set forth in our decision in *Sigler*. To the extent that the trial court implicitly relied on any right to contract argument by Appellee, Appellant's Fourth Assignment of Error is well taken.

{¶23} For the foregoing reasons, we find Appellant's arguments to be meritorious and sustain all four Assignments of Error. Senate Bill 10 is constitutional and, as courts across Ohio have repeatedly held, does not violate prohibitions against retroactive or ex post facto laws.

{¶24} The judgment of the Court of Common Pleas, Richland County, Ohio, is therefore reversed and this case is remanded for proceedings in accordance with our opinion and the law.

By: Wise, J.

Farmer, P. J., and

Gwin, J., concur.

JUDGES

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS FOR RICHLAND COUNTY, OHIO
FIFTH APPELLATE DISTRICT

MICHAEL N. JOHNSON

Petitioner-Appellee

-vs-

STATE OF OHIO

Respondent-Appellant

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JUDGMENT ENTRY

Case No. 08 CA 302

For the reasons stated in our accompanying Memorandum-Opinion, the judgment of the Court of Common Pleas of Richland County, Ohio, is reversed and remanded for further proceedings consistent with this opinion.

Costs assessed to appellee.

JUDGES