

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF OHIO
SECOND APPELLATE DISTRICT
CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

STATE OF OHIO

Appellee

v.

SIERRA NICOLE DAVIS

Appellant

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C.A. No. 2026-CA-1

Trial Court Case No. 2025 CR 110

(Criminal Appeal from Common Pleas
Court)

**FINAL JUDGMENT ENTRY &
OPINION**

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Pursuant to the opinion of this court rendered on August 21, 2026, the judgment of the trial court is affirmed.

Costs to be paid as stated in App.R. 24.

Pursuant to Ohio App.R. 30(A), the clerk of the court of appeals shall immediately send a copy of the court's ruling to each party and note that action on the docket. Additionally, pursuant to App.R. 27, the clerk of the court of appeals shall send a certified copy of this judgment, which constitutes a mandate, to the clerk of the trial court and note the service on the appellate docket.

For the court,



MARY K. HUFFMAN, JUDGE

EPLEY, J., and HANSEMAN, J., concur.

OPINION
CHAMPAIGN C.A. No. 2026-CA-1

STEVEN H. ECKSTEIN, Attorney for Appellant
BENJAMIN T. HOSKINSON, Attorney for Appellee

HUFFMAN, J.

{¶ 1} Sierra Nicole Davis appeals her conviction of one count of aggravated possession of drugs, which followed her guilty plea. For the following reasons, the judgment of the Champaign County Common Pleas Court is affirmed.

I. Background

{¶ 2} On October 15, 2025, Davis was indicted on two counts of fifth-degree felony aggravated possession of drugs and one count of first-degree misdemeanor possessing drug abuse instruments. The court held a scheduling conference on her case on January 7, 2026, at which the prosecutor indicated that an agreement had been reached where Davis would enter a guilty plea to one count of aggravated possession of drugs, and the two remaining charges would be dismissed. The prosecutor also stated that Davis agreed to forfeit eighteen items of property to the Champaign County Sheriff's Department, and that she agreed to pay any court costs and court-appointed legal fees that may be imposed by the court.

{¶ 3} The court then questioned Davis, and she confirmed her understanding of the plea agreement. She acknowledged her desire to enter a guilty plea, that she was not under the influence of any drug or medication, and that she had consulted with counsel and her mother, who were present in the courtroom. Davis verified that she had reviewed discovery with counsel, that counsel had done everything she asked during his representation, that she had sufficient time to speak with counsel, and that she had enough information to decide

whether to accept the plea agreement. Davis repeatedly acknowledged her understanding of each statement made by the court, that she understood the proceedings, and that the plea was her voluntary choice.

{¶ 4} Prior to entering her plea, the court provided Davis with an opportunity to review with defense counsel a detailed five-page plea of guilty agreement and entry. A thorough plea colloquy followed, during which the court reviewed the nature of the offense to which Davis was pleading, the potential maximum penalties for the offense, her constitutional rights, and the effect of her guilty plea. Davis pleaded guilty to one count of aggravated possession of drugs and waived a presentence investigation. The trial court then took statements from the State, defense counsel, and Davis. The trial court sentenced Davis to 10 months in prison to be served concurrently with another Champaign County sentence.

II. Analysis

{¶ 5} In her sole assignment of error, Davis contends that her guilty plea was not knowing, intelligent, and voluntary. She does not contend that the trial judge failed to strictly comply with the necessary Crim. R. 11(C) colloquy. Instead, she argues that she was not competent to enter a guilty plea and that the trial court should have further inquired into her competency rather than proceeding with the plea colloquy. We do not agree.

{¶ 6} Due process requires that a guilty plea be made knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily. *Boykin v. Alabama*, 395. U.S. 238 (1969); *State v. Clark*, 2008-Ohio-3748, ¶ 25; *State v. Hill*, 2020-Ohio-7, ¶ 7 (2d Dist.). A trial court's compliance with Crim. R. 11(C) ensures the knowing, intelligent and voluntary nature of a plea. *State v. Cole*, 2015-Ohio-3793 (2d Dist.). A review of the record confirms that the trial court strictly complied with Crim.R. 11 and conducted a thorough plea colloquy to ensure that Davis understood the nature of the proceedings and was capable of entering her guilty plea knowingly, intelligently,

and voluntarily. Nevertheless, Davis contends that she was not competent to enter a guilty plea and that the trial court should have sua sponte ordered a competency evaluation.

{¶ 7} A defendant's competence to knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily enter a guilty plea is measured by the same standard used to determine whether a defendant is competent to stand trial. *State v. Simpson*, 2016-Ohio-1267, ¶ 11 (2d Dist.), citing *Godinez v. Moran*, 509 U.S. 389, 397-398 (1993). "Fundamental principles of due process require that a criminal defendant who is legally incompetent shall not be subjected to trial." *State v. Berry*, 72 Ohio St.3d 354, 359 (1995). While a defendant is presumed competent to stand trial, that presumption may be rebutted. *State v. Schooler*, 2018-Ohio-3295, ¶ 26 (2d Dist.). It is the defendant's burden to establish that she is not competent to stand trial or plead guilty. *Id.* at ¶ 29, citing *State v. Ferguson*, 2018-Ohio-987, ¶ 20 (2d Dist.).

{¶ 8} According to R.C. 2945.37(G), "[i]f, after a hearing, the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that, because of the defendant's *present* mental condition, the defendant is incapable of understanding the nature and objective of the proceedings against the defendant or of assisting in the defendant's defense, the court shall find the defendant incompetent to stand trial" (Emphasis added.) "In the context of a plea, the test, as appropriately modified, is whether the defendant ha[d] the ability to consult with his lawyer, whether he ha[d] a reasonable and rational factual understanding of the charges to which he is pleading guilty, and whether he ha[d] a reasonable and rational understanding of the rights he is waiving by pleading guilty." *State v. McCain*, 2021-Ohio-1605, ¶ 7 (2d Dist.), citing *State v. Zachery*, 2004-Ohio-6821 (5th Dist.).

{¶ 9} When evaluating whether a defendant has rebutted the presumption of competence to stand trial or enter a plea, the court should consider a variety of factors, including "doubts articulated by counsel, a defendant's 'irrational behavior,' a 'defendant's

demeanor,’ and any ‘prior medical opinion relating to competence.’” *State v. McCain*, ¶ 8, quoting *Schooler* at ¶ 27, quoting *State v. Rubenstein*, 40 Ohio App.3d 57, 60-61 (8th Dist. 1987). “Absent sufficient indicia of incompetency, a trial court need not hold a competency hearing.” *State v. Johnson*, 2024-Ohio-6048, ¶ 11 (2d Dist.), citing *State v. Stiltner*, 2019-Ohio-4631, ¶ 8 (3d Dist.).

{¶ 10} Davis argues that the factual support for her claim of incompetency lies in the trial court’s reference at sentencing to 135 calls she made to her methamphetamine supplier in February 2025 during the pendency of a prior felony case, her history of what she describes as her “chronic and overwhelming drug habit,” and what she characterizes as “other irrational acts.” We have previously concluded that “[b]ecause a defendant may be emotionally disturbed or even psychotic and still be capable of understanding the charges against him and assisting his counsel, incompetence must not be equated with ‘mere’ mental illness or emotional instability.” *Schooler*, 2018-Ohio-3295, at ¶ 28 (2d Dist.). Similarly, a defendant’s history of substance use or abuse, without more evidence supporting the defendant’s lack of capacity to understand his or her charges or assist counsel, does not overcome the presumption of the defendant’s competence to stand trial or to enter a plea.

{¶ 11} Davis does not argue that she could not reasonably consult with counsel or that she did not have a reasonable understanding of the proceedings pending against her. A review of the record of Davis’s combined plea and sentencing hearing confirms that she had the ability to consult with her lawyer. The record also reflects that Davis had both a reasonable and rational factual understanding of the charge to which she pled guilty and of the rights she waived by doing so. Neither defense counsel, the prosecutor, nor the trial court suggested a concern regarding her competence. Davis verbally acknowledged her

understanding of each question posed by the trial court. She confirmed that she desired to enter a guilty plea and that entering a plea was her decision.

{¶ 12} Additionally, Davis's behavior during the plea and sentencing hearing was rational, respectful, and appropriate; her responses to the questions posed by the court and the comments made by her counsel were responsive and applicable. There is no suggestion in the record that any prior medical opinion regarding Davis's competence to stand trial or to enter a plea had previously been requested or expressed. Nothing in the record suggests that Davis had any diminished intellectual capacity. By her own admission, she had prior criminal justice involvement, reflecting at least some understanding of the court process. The trial court did acknowledge that Davis made 135 calls to an individual who supplied her with drugs. The court raised this incident in discussing her prior rehabilitative efforts, which occurred during a probation revocation proceeding that was approximately eleven months before her plea in this case. Absent evidence suggesting that Davis lacked the ability to understand the nature of the plea proceeding in this case, her conduct in the prior case, without more, did not suggest a lack of competence. The record does not reveal any facts that should have alerted the trial court that further inquiry into Davis's competence was either necessary or appropriate before taking her plea.

{¶ 13} Given the record before us, the trial court did not err in failing to sua sponte order a competence evaluation. Instead, the record supports a conclusion that Davis failed to overcome the presumption that she was competent to enter a plea. Thus, we cannot conclude that Davis's guilty plea was less than knowing, intelligent, and voluntary. Davis's assignment of error is overruled.

III. Conclusion

{¶ 14} Having overruled Davis's assignment of error, the judgment of the trial court is affirmed.

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EPLEY, J., and HANSEMAN, J., concur.