

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA, PINELLAS COUNTY

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Plaintiff,

Case Nos. 21-08749-CF

21-01513-CF

vs.

21-01099-CF

CORNELIUS TREVON WHITFIELD,

Defendant.

/

PROCEEDINGS: Pretrial Hearing

DATE: July 24, 2026

BEFORE: The Honorable Philip J. Federico
Circuit Court Judge

PLACE: Pinellas County Justice Center
14250 49th Street North
Clearwater, Florida 33762

REPORTER: Beth Ellenwood
Digital Court Reporter

Administrative Office of the Courts
Digital Court Reporting Department
Pinellas County Justice Center
14250 49th Street North, Ste. H-2000
Clearwater, Florida 33762
(727) 453-7474

A P P E A R A N C E S

APPEARING ON BEHALF OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA:

Thomas Demetrious Koskinas, Assistant State Attorney
Office of Bruce Bartlett, State Attorney
Sixth Judicial Circuit, Pinellas County
14250 49th Street North
Clearwater, Florida 33762

APPEARING ON BEHALF OF THE DEFENDANT:

Julia B. Seifer-Smith, Assistant Public Defender
Margaret S. Russell, Assistant Public Defender
Office of Sara Mollo, Public Defender
Sixth Judicial Circuit, Pinellas County
14250 49th Street North
Clearwater, Florida 33762

OTHER APPEARANCES:

Daniela Camacho, Esquire, appearing on behalf of
Shirleyleene Harilal

Leslie Carter, mother of victim Darren Barnes

Brittany Barnes, Next of Kin to Defendant

Rashad Whitfield, Nephew of victim Antonio Graham

P R O C E E D I N G S

THE COURT: All right. We're here on State of Florida versus Cornelius Whitfield. We'll bring Mr. Whitfield in. Thank you, Bailiff.

THE BAILIFF: We're going to have you sit down with your attorney today.

THE COURT: Yeah. I think Counsel table is best. Counsel table makes more sense.

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Yes, please. Thank you.

THE COURT: I -- I don't -- well, yeah, see if you can get that ready. I'm not going to do that first but at least have -- is that Ms. Brooks (Phonetic)? Is that Ms. Brooks?

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Yes.

MS. RUSSELL: Yes.

THE COURT: All right. I wanted her to be able to be here. Good morning, Ms. Brooks. We got the sound on?

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: That's okay. We don't expect her to say anything. We wanted her to be able to hear --

THE COURT: I understand.

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: -- and see the proceedings.

THE COURT: I understand. No, I agree.

THE CLERK: So leave her microphone off?

1 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I'm sorry?

2 THE CLERK: Leave her microphone off?

3 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Actually, no. You can -- you
4 can turn it on.

5 THE COURT: Yeah. Let -- let's turn it on.

6 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Okay.

7 THE COURT: Because I won't know which button to
8 hit to turn it on when we --

9 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Thank you.

10 THE COURT: -- actually have an opportunity for
11 her to talk.

12 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: And we very much appreciate
13 the accommodation.

14 THE COURT: Not a problem. Let me know when
15 it's on.

16 THE CLERK: I'm asking her to unmute.

17 THE COURT: Ms. Brooks, can you hear me?

18 THE CLERK: She -- I just asked her to unmute.

19 THE COURT: All right. We're going to -- we're
20 going start our hearing if you want at some point,
21 we'll give you a chance to comment or participate.
22 Okay?

23 MS. BROOKS: Thank you. I appreciate it.

24 THE COURT: All right. We're here on State of
25 Florida versus Cornelius Whitfield. The case

1 originally set for trial on Monday was 21-01099; a
2 charge of murder in the first-degree, attempt murder
3 first-degree, robbery. Also pending is 21-010 -- no,
4 that's the one I just read. Also pending is
5 21-01513; three Counts murder in the first degree,
6 attempt murder in the first degree. And 21-08749;
7 intro into or possession of contraband in a county
8 detention facility.

9 Mr. Whitfield is present. We had a hearing --
10 was it last week, I think? Right?

11 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Yes.

12 THE COURT: The Defense, after doing -- just
13 finishing depositions on a couple of experts, filed some
14 motions to exclude testimony of the tool and die
15 expert and were going to file a motion to exclude the
16 testimony of the fingerprint person.

17 Because of the substance of those motions, we
18 decided we couldn't go ahead with the -099 trial
19 which was set on this coming Monday. So we gathered
20 together, talked about that, and then the Defense
21 made an offer of life imprisonment on the pending
22 charges without parole.

23 Mr. Koskinas asked for some time to talk to
24 Mr. Bartlett and the victim's family and then they
25 would inform us today of what their decision was.

1 So I assume you had a chance to talk to
2 Mr. Bartlett and the victim's family, Mr. Koskinas?

3 MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, we're going to reject the
4 defendant's offer.

5 THE COURT: All right. Did you have an
6 opportunity to speak to both?

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

8 MR. KOSKINAS: We -- we've -- yes. We
9 understand the position of the victim's family
10 and -- and yes, those conferences with Mr. Bartlett.

11 THE COURT: Okay.

12 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Your Honor, I would like to
13 just note that the attorney for Ms. Shirleyleene
14 Harilal, who is the next of kin for both her mother,
15 grandmother, and brother is present in the Court and
16 can probably inform Your Honor as to whether or not
17 the State had the respect of reaching out to them --

18 THE COURT: All right.

19 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: -- for an opinion regarding
20 the possible resolution of a 5 1/2-year-old case.

21 THE COURT: Let's -- let's first say -- State,
22 you're rejecting the offer from the Defense?

23 MR. KOSKINAS: Rejected.

24 THE COURT: The offer is life in prison but
25 without parole. That was the offer made by the

1 Defense?

2 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: That's correct.

3 THE COURT: All right. And was there any
4 discussion or were you open to the discussion about
5 whether some of those sentences were done concurrent
6 or consecutive?

7 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: There was no conversation
8 with the State about it. It seems as though they
9 have rejected it out of hand --

10 THE COURT: Right.

11 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: -- without consultation with
12 the people who are going to be the most affected by
13 this.

14 THE COURT: Which your point was is that you
15 just wanted them to waive the death penalty. Had
16 they come back and suggested they wanted consecutive
17 sentences, you would have had a conversation with
18 your client about that. Is that --

19 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Of course we would have.

20 THE COURT: Okay. Are you here on behalf of the
21 victim's family?

22 MS. CAMACHO: Your Honor, I'm here on behalf of
23 Ms. Harilal. Daniela Camacho. We do represent the
24 main victim of the attempted murder in the -513. The
25 next of kin (unintelligible).

1 THE COURT: All right. Put your name on the
2 record.

3 MS. CAMACHO: Daniela Camacho, Gulfcoast Legal
4 Services.

5 THE COURT: All right. And give the names of
6 the folks that you're here to --

7 MS. CAMACHO: I only represent Ms. Shirleyleene
8 Harilal.

9 THE COURT: And that is --

10 MS. CAMACHO: The mother. Mr. Whitfield's
11 mother.

12 THE COURT: Okay.

13 MS. CAMACHO: She is next of kin in the -513
14 cases and she is the victim of the attempted murder
15 in the -513 case as well.

16 THE COURT: All right. So she's the victim in
17 the attempted murder?

18 MS. CAMACHO: Yes, Your Honor.

19 THE COURT: The victims in the -- there's four
20 victims of the actual homicides. Right?

21 MS. CAMACHO: In the -513, I know there's, and
22 please correct me, there are three.

23 THE COURT: All right. Is there a relationship
24 between family members that you want to put on the
25 record in those cases?

1 MS. CAMACHO: Yes, Your Honor. It was her, and
2 again -- I may be corrected, please -- mother,
3 brother --

4 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: And grandmother.

5 MS. CAMACHO: Grandmother. Thank you.

6 THE COURT: Okay. And so on behalf of the
7 family itself?

8 MS. CAMACHO: On behalf of Ms. Harilal. I -- I
9 can only speak for Ms. Harilal.

10 THE COURT: And she was the victim on one of the
11 attempted murders?

12 MS. CAMACHO: Yes, Your Honor.

13 THE COURT: Was she actually shot or shot at?

14 MS. CAMACHO: She was wounded.

15 THE COURT: Okay. And so was she consulted by
16 the State as far as this decision?

17 MS. CAMACHO: Not as this most recent decision.
18 My understanding is that her wishes, which is that
19 the death penalty not be applied, that this -- even
20 though she is the victim, this is her son. She does
21 not wish to see him die.

22 My understanding is both the State and the
23 Defense, and perhaps Your Honor as well, have been
24 greatly informed of her wish. She was not consulted
25 most recently, however. But I do believe the State

1 was aware --

2 THE COURT: Okay.

3 MS. CAMACHO: -- that she did not want her son
4 to die.

5 THE COURT: All right. Anything else that you
6 want to indicate for the record?

7 MS. CAMACHO: Just to reiterate, Your Honor,
8 this is a mother who has been severely traumatized,
9 severely victimized both by what happened and by the
10 process. She's has been waiting for justice for five
11 years. It is her son. She does not wish to see him
12 die.

13 THE COURT: All right. Any knowledge, Defense,
14 about other family members of victims in the case?

15 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Through our mitigation
16 investigation, our mitigation specialist has spoken
17 with several family members who are also supportive
18 of a life plea in this case.

19 THE COURT: So that's kind of an unusual
20 circumstance. Right?

21 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: It certainly is.

22 THE COURT: Typically, we would have a different
23 conversation with -- I mean, it a four-homicide case
24 but they're all family members. Right?

25 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Correct.

1 MR. KOSKINAS: No.

2 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: So Ms. -- we're talking about
3 the death penalty case only. The State is seeking
4 death in only one case; the -1513 case.

5 THE COURT: Right.

6 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: In that case, Mr. Whitfield
7 is accused of three capital homicides and a
8 first-degree attempted homicide.

9 He's accused of shooting and hitting his mother,
10 Ms. Shirleyleene Harilal, who is the -- who is the
11 daughter, the granddaughter, and the sister of the
12 three decedents in that case. She has made her
13 position very, very clear on multiple occasions that
14 she does not want her child, Mr. Cornelius Whitfield,
15 to be subject to the death penalty.

16 THE COURT: Okay.

17 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: We've spoken with a number of
18 other family members who have also iterated that as
19 well. My understanding is that Ms. Carter, who is
20 present in front of Your Honor today, who is the next
21 of kin in the other homicide from February 1st,
22 Darren Barnes is Ms. Carter's son, that she would
23 like this case, all of this, to be over.

24 And so what the State is doing, by rejecting
25 this offer, is prolonging the pain of multiple

1 families, scores of people, a drain on incredible
2 resources of multiple offices for a verdict that ends
3 with the same result.

4 Mr. Whitfield will go to prison and he will die
5 there. That is what his offer was. And the idea
6 that the State is not going to respect either of
7 these families whatsoever in moving forward for the
8 possibility of a death verdict is unconscionable.

9 THE COURT: I guess the other --

10 MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, I feel the need to respond
11 right now --

12 THE COURT: Well, let -- let me --

13 MR. KOSKINAS: -- to that. And actually --

14 THE COURT: Let me --

15 MR. KOSKINAS: She's accused the State of --

16 THE COURT: Let me make --

17 MR. KOSKINAS: -- delaying the case --

18 THE COURT: Sit down, Mr. Koskinas. As long as
19 I'm in court, I'll tell you when you can respond.
20 Okay? I have some things to say and I'll give you an
21 opportunity. But as long as I wear the robe, I
22 decide when you talk. Okay? Is that understood?

23 MR. KOSKINAS: Yes, sir.

24 THE COURT: Thank you. All right. In addition
25 to that, you and your co-counsel, who've been here a

1 long time and served admirably, are moving on to new
2 positions. Right? And outside of this courthouse.

3 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: That's correct.

4 THE COURT: Within what? A few days?

5 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Correct. Next Friday.

6 THE COURT: So you've handled -- you two have
7 handled this case, and why don't you -- Ms. Russell
8 and you have handled this case from its inception.
9 Right?

10 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: That's not correct.

11 Unfortunately, due to the virtue of Public Defender's
12 Offices, poor Mr. Whitfield has had a number of
13 attorneys; he was represented by Ms. Ferber Miller.
14 He was represented by Ms. Manuele. Both of them have
15 gone on to greener pastures as we suppose. And then
16 I took over the case in early 2025 when Ms. Manuele
17 left.

18 So Ms. Russell and I have been on the case for
19 about 18 months, and we were hoping to see it to its
20 final end. As we all know, the decision by the State
21 means that certainly there will be trials, but also
22 that there will be quite literally decades upon
23 decades of appeals.

24 THE COURT: And you have to get new lawyers who
25 have, at this point, have not been assigned to the

1 case and we don't know who are going to be taking
2 over Mr. Whitfield's defense.

3 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: That is also correct.

4 THE COURT: Okay. Ultimately, whoever it
5 is -- if you were the lawyers presenting mitigation
6 on his behalf, the families' wishes would certainly
7 be something that would be presented in mitigation at
8 ultimately a sentencing if we got to that point.
9 Right?

10 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: It would.

11 THE COURT: Because anything, as we know in a
12 death penalty case, can be mitigation. Right?

13 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Correct.

14 THE COURT: And the families' wishes about what
15 should happen would certainly be mitigation in a
16 death case.

17 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Certainly.

18 THE COURT: So you'd have the unusual position,
19 which I've never seen in 43 years, in which a
20 victim's family or family members would be indicating
21 to the Court that they did not want the Court to
22 impose that sentence. That -- right?

23 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Correct. Now, Judge --

24 THE COURT: In the event that a jury actually
25 recommends, by a vote of at least 8 to 4, that he

1 should receive the death penalty. And then I would
2 have to make an independent determination and I would
3 have to take into account what the victims' families'
4 recommendation would be. Correct?

5 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Certainly.

6 THE COURT: All right. For the record, do you
7 want me to hear from --

8 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: So Ms. Brooks is the maternal
9 great aunt of Mr. Whitfield's child. So she is
10 not -- she is not a family member of any of the
11 decedents or any of the surviving victims.

12 THE COURT: All right. So would we -- how would
13 we characterize her in relation to everybody involved
14 in the case? She's just an interested party?

15 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: She is an interested party
16 certainly. She has been caring for Mr. Whitfield's
17 child for the past several years.

18 THE COURT: Who's how old now?

19 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: And she also supports the
20 plea.

21 THE COURT: All right. Let me hear from
22 Mr. Koskinas and then we'll proceed further. Go
23 ahead Mr. Koskinas.

24 MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, the suggestion by the
25 Defense that the State has somehow delayed this case

1 is not only inaccurate, it's laughable.

2 The Defense -- the Public Defender's Office,
3 from the beginning of this case, has obstructed,
4 delayed, and manipulated this -- the proceedings to
5 delay a trial in both cases for in excess of five
6 years.

7 We've had one, two, three, four, five, six,
8 seven prior trial dates. So for them now, at this
9 stage, and by the way, the reason the trial next week
10 is being continued is because of further manipulation
11 by the Public Defender's Office and, specifically,
12 these two. The tradition carried on when these two
13 took over for the last attorneys.

14 So I find it hard to believe that they can stand
15 here and chastise the State with a straight face when
16 they know what they've done.

17 Additionally, Judge, they have a conflict in
18 this case. They're going to withdraw from this case.
19 They called me a week prior to the trial date and
20 asked if we could remove a witness so that they
21 wouldn't have to withdraw from the case. We
22 attempted to accommodate them by coming up with the
23 potential agreement, which never got to the Court.
24 We have not removed that witness. They are going to
25 withdraw. They never brought that to anybody's

1 attention, did they?

2 So, Judge, at the last minute -- by the way,
3 she's just filed and handed me another evidentiary
4 motion. Another evidentiary motion five years later.
5 So for them to somehow suggest the delay is on the
6 State is absurd and wrong. And I want the record to
7 be clear.

8 As for the decision-making as to the death
9 penalty, Judge, it sounds like the -- the argument
10 and confrontation deals with the legislature. He
11 qualifies for the death penalty. He deserves the
12 death penalty. And I'll leave it at that.

13 THE COURT: Your office is the only one that
14 feels that way. Right? I haven't heard anybody
15 speak in contra to that as far as this point is
16 concerned.

17 Apparently, from what I can glean, the people
18 that are involved in the family weren't discussed or
19 discussed what the potential disposition is, so I'm
20 at a loss.

21 Ultimately, you can seek it, but ultimately a
22 jury has to decide and then ultimately, while I have
23 to give it great weight, I'm the one that has to make
24 that decision if we get to that point. Correct?

25 MR. KOSKINAS: Yes.

1 THE COURT: And we are so -- still so far from
2 that point we're literally to spend tens of thousands
3 of dollars if not hundreds of thousands of dollars.

4 He's willing to accept responsibility and never
5 be released from prison again. While that may not be
6 the ultimate result, you're weighing the cost of
7 taxpayers, the families' wishes, which I -- I can't
8 think of another time in 43 years which a family said
9 don't impose the death penalty. Right? Normally,
10 they're here saying, get after -- that's why we have
11 *Spencer* hearings, right, so that the victim's family,
12 even though it's not legally a part of the decision
13 making, has a chance to say what they want or what
14 they think the appropriate sentence should be.

15 So we're at an entirely unusual position having
16 this conversation, and on top of that, we got to
17 start all over again because they're leaving with a
18 whole new attorney or attorneys as part of the
19 process.

20 So your -- your main complaint is is that you
21 think they're maneuvering this situation and causing
22 it to last 5 1/2 years. With new lawyers, when do
23 you anticipate we'll actually get to the meat of the
24 coconut in this decision? Based on -- yeah, based on
25 your handicapping of the situation.

1 MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, I can't -- I can't answer
2 that question, respectfully. We don't even know who
3 the new attorneys are going to be.

4 THE COURT: Correct.

5 MR. KOSKINAS: And whether they're going to
6 obstruct or not.

7 THE COURT: So the end. Period. Right? That
8 could be today. Put a period at the end of it. No?

9 MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, you know what? At this
10 point, Judge, I think, honestly, you've been
11 advocating for the life sentence for so long in this
12 case, I think the Court needs to reflect about
13 whether you can be fair to the State about whether a
14 death penalty should be imposed in this case.

15 THE COURT: You know what? Go talk to --

16 MR. KOSKINAS: You didn't argue --

17 THE COURT: Go talk to Barlett. You want to
18 file a motion? File a damn motion. Okay? You talk
19 about maneuvering -- what, you're going to maneuver
20 now? We don't like --

21 MR. KOSKINAS: No. I haven't maneuvered at all.

22 THE COURT: -- what the Judge is -- we don't
23 like what the Judge has had to say so we're going to
24 get another damn Judge? Have at it. If that's what
25 you want. Have at it. I'll put my 43 years up

1 against anybody else. You don't think I'm being
2 fair?

3 I've handled 150 of these cases over the last 43
4 years, both sitting in your seat for 11 years
5 prosecuting these cases, right, as well as 32 years
6 sitting up here deciding them. You don't think I'm
7 being fair to both sides? Go find somebody else.
8 Okay? That's what you want? File a motion. It's
9 that simple. You get with Mr. Bartlett hiding behind
10 the curtain down there and ask him whether he wants
11 that done. All right?

12 MR. KOSKINAS: I think, Judge, that's -- that's
13 inappropriate for the Court to suggest.

14 THE COURT: The man behind the curtain. The
15 Great Oz. You talk to him and let him decide what he
16 wants to do. Right? You had started it. You
17 started the conversation. I'll finish it. You do
18 what you damn please as far as that's concerned.
19 Okay? Anybody else that we need to hear from this
20 morning?

21 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I believe Ms. Carter would
22 like to be heard.

23 THE COURT: Okay. And she -- come on up, ma'am.

24 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: She is the mother of
25 Mr. Barnes.

1 THE BAILIFF: Your Honor, do you want her at the
2 podium or --

3 THE COURT: No. That's fine right there.

4 MS. CARTER: Judge Federico, I'm so sorry and
5 I'm so sorry for everybody, but Judge, he was my only
6 boy. I'm raising two of his kids and I take
7 care -- I'm raising five grandkids on my own as it is
8 now.

9 Judge, whatever he did, he did and I promise
10 you, God forgive me, I do hate his guts. But to keep
11 me coming here every time then -- I want it over.
12 It's -- that's between him and God, Judge Federico.

13 And then, I'm not being funny to nobody. Him
14 being disrespectful. What happened to his family; it
15 happened. But what happened to my son -- I don't
16 care how technical -- I'm not smart like that. I
17 want this over.

18 If he wants to plea life without parole, I'm so
19 -- I want it over. You can't keep taking nobody
20 through this. I'm a single grandmother. I work
21 hard. And this -- and this -- every time I come, it
22 just digs. It digs. And that was my only boy. And
23 I don't care what he did in life, he was a part of me
24 and God. So it's not for nobody to judge him or
25 nobody but I want it over, Judge Federico.

1 You all, please. And I don't -- I don't
2 understand how much trial case got something to do
3 with this. This -- this -- this separate. It
4 took -- it was two whole weeks.

5 Stop doing me like this. I want it over so me
6 and these kids can live and keep on going.
7 It's -- it's taking a lot out of me, Judge, and I'm
8 getting sick. But like I said, that's between him
9 and God. That's between him and God.

10 THE COURT: Okay.

11 MS. CARTER: And I'm -- I'm just tired, Judge.

12 THE COURT: I understand.

13 MS. CARTER: I want it over. And I don't, like
14 I said, I don't know why it keep -- it keep this,
15 like, that's -- I feel bad about his family but then
16 I'm just worrying about my child. I'm worried about
17 my child. I don't have nothing to do with them
18 people. And I feel bad because I lost my child but I
19 don't have nothing to do -- stop putting my -- my
20 child with them. Get this over with.

21 I'm going to tell you what I want. I
22 want -- whatever they decide -- let him and God
23 settle that. That's -- that's all I got to say
24 because I do -- I don't like him -- I don't like him,
25 and that's the end of it. But that's between him and

1 God. He got himself -- that's something he going to
2 answer for with him and God because that was my only
3 child. That was my only son.

4 In regards to where he was or what he -- he was
5 a good child of me and that's all that matters and
6 between -- that's between him -- that was between him
7 and God, too, with my child. So that -- let that be
8 between him and God with him. But stop it. It's
9 enough. It's on -- going on five years.

10 THE COURT: I understand, ma'am. Thank you.

11 MR. KOSKINAS: Ms. Barnes, can I ask you a
12 question?

13 MS. BARNES: Yeah. You can ask me.

14 MR. KOSKINAS: Ms. Barnes, you've been to every
15 single court date, haven't you?

16 MS. BARNES: Yes. I have.

17 MR. KOSKINAS: And you've had the opportunity to
18 see everything that's happened?

19 MS. BARNES: Yes, sir.

20 MR. KOSKINAS: In Court. Is that right?

21 MS. BARNES: Yes, sir.

22 MR. KOSKINAS: Now, ma'am, in your perception,
23 has the State in any way delayed this case?

24 MS. BARNES: No. Judge, see -- that's what I'm
25 saying, see --

1 MR. KOSKINAS: Well, let me ask you --

2 MS. BARNES: No. No.

3 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Oh, come on.

4 MS. BARNES: He -- no. He had -- no, listen.

5 MR. KOSKINAS: Okay.

6 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Your Honor --

7 MS. BARNES: He's -- as far as I'm concerned --

8 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Your Honor --

9 MR. KOSKINAS: All right.

10 MS. BARNES: -- that's -- that's when it --

11 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: This is an inappropriate line
12 of questioning.

13 MS. BARNES: When he hasn't -- as I see, he's
14 been doing his job. He's never -- he did his job
15 very well to me. I don't have -- I just want -- I
16 don't -- I don't like the fact that they speaking for
17 me on -- on the -- the -- the -- the only thing I
18 don't like, Judge Federico, is somebody speaking for
19 me and don't let me speak my rights for what I want
20 to happen.

21 MR. KOSKINAS: Ms. Barnes?

22 MS. BARNES: That's -- that's how I feel about
23 it.

24 MR. KOSKINAS: Well, being here and seeing all
25 that's happened in Court, do you have an opinion

1 about why and -- and how this case has been
2 obstructed from going to trial? Does somebody seem
3 to be fighting against that?

4 MS. BARNES: Yes.

5 MR. KOSKINAS: What was your impression, ma'am?

6 THE COURT: We're going to --

7 MS. BARNES: Judge, that's -- that's --

8 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Your Honor -- Your Honor, I
9 think at this point --

10 MS. BARNES: Yep.

11 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: This is inappropriate.

12 THE COURT: It is. We're going to qualify her
13 as an expert witness on courtroom procedure now,
14 Mr. Koskinas?

15 MR. KOSKINAS: I just asked her impression,
16 Judge.

17 THE COURT: Thank you, ma'am.

18 MS. BARNES: Thank you, sir.

19 THE COURT: All right. So I guess we're going
20 to reset a pretrial I suppose until we have -- you
21 guys are going to withdraw? Is that what the latest
22 procedural aspect is?

23 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I don't know. I can't speak
24 on that.

25 THE COURT: Well, you guys got to withdraw,

1 right?

2 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Well, I mean, Ms. Russell and
3 I certainly are withdrawing because we're leaving the
4 office.

5 THE COURT: But you don't know whether the
6 office is taking the position you need to withdraw or
7 not?

8 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I don't. I need to speak
9 with my supervisor.

10 THE COURT: So how long should we reset this for
11 from your perspective?

12 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I'd ask for a week reset.

13 MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, there's another person in
14 the stand. I think it's the defendant's brother who
15 wants to speak. I don't know if you're going to
16 entertain that.

17 THE COURT: Well, I guess it -- if they're a
18 part of the victim's family then certainly they have
19 a right to express -- we're kind of caught up in
20 who's family and who's not because it's kind of
21 interrelated. Right? All of this? I guess the --

22 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Yes. Yes. Mr. Rashaud
23 (Phonetic) Whitfield is Cornelius Whitfield's
24 brother. He is the son of Ms. Harilal. He is the
25 grandchild of Mr. Sallie Whitfield, the great

1 grandchild of Ms. Patricia Whitfield.

2 MR. WHITFIELD: No.

3 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I'm sorry. I inverted that.
4 The grandchild of Ms. Patricia Sharp (Phonetic), the
5 great grandchild of Ms. Sallie Whitfied, and the
6 nephew of Mr. Antonio Graham.

7 THE COURT: So he's related to both, I guess, is
8 the net result. Right?

9 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Correct. He is related to
10 both Mr. Cornelius Whitfield --

11 THE COURT: Well then, if he's part of the --

12 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: -- as well as the victims in
13 -1513.

14 THE COURT: Well then if he's part of the
15 victim's family, he should have the right to address
16 the Court.

17 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: He does under the Florida
18 Constitution.

19 THE COURT: And I -- I -- we might as well have
20 our say. Come on up, sir.

21 MR. WHITFIELD: How you doing?

22 THE COURT: Good morning, sir. Can you -- for
23 the record, can you announce on the microphone your
24 name? I know this is difficult for you. Take a
25 moment, have a breath, and then if you could tell me

1 your name and share with us what you'd like to share.

2 MR. WHITFIELD: I'm Rashaud Whitfield, Cornelius
3 Whitfield's big brother. I'm the member of the
4 deceased. I'm also a friend of the deceased as well.

5 We all want this over. I don't know what the
6 State talking about. I don't know what they talking
7 about. But he can take that up with God, just like
8 this lady said.

9 That's my brother. I don't want to see him die.
10 I don't want to see him in prison. But he did what
11 he did and he got to wear what he wear. Those are
12 his choices. He made those choices, allegedly. He
13 got to live with that. Nobody else.

14 I don't know this lady. I knew her son. But
15 for her to be at every court date, getting sick,
16 taking care of kids and stuff and still getting drug
17 in here; it's got to stop.

18 It's five years of taxpayers' dollars and I
19 work. I don't be in the streets. I work. I just
20 got hit by a car; I got two broke ankles. I got four
21 children that I take care of by myself. I'm tired of
22 this. My momma tired of it. My sister's tired of
23 it. None of my family even want to come and deal
24 with it because it's five years.

25 Everybody know what happened so how long this

1 going to go on? We going to make a documentary of
2 it? Oh, a 10-year trial? This don't make no sense.

3 At the end of the day, everybody got to start
4 thinking about everybody families that's involved
5 rather than thinking about their selves and their job
6 securities. This is ridiculous.

7 If he's going to admit, let him admit. Let him
8 plea out. That's what the State does. Ask for the
9 story, let him plea out, let it go on. Please don't
10 drag us no more. I'm not trying to live another
11 year, three, or five years chasing behind this.

12 We all got lives to live and right now none of
13 us should have been here because it should have been
14 over with. It should have been over with.
15 Everybody's in here is frustrated with it. It's on
16 everybody's face including the deputies.

17 So let's start thinking about everybody else and
18 start thinking about what's right here and what we
19 really need to be doing. Gas is expensive. I don't
20 have job security. I got two broke ankles and still
21 taking care of four children. And I'm here today.
22 And that's it.

23 THE COURT: Thank you. And all I can add is
24 that this has obviously torn the family apart on
25 everybody's side because it's all family members that

1 are involved. Putting it to a rest and ending this
2 situation with a compromise from all sides seems to
3 be the suggestion that was on the table.

4 I'm not favoring one side or other, I just want
5 it to end. I want the families' pain to end; put it
6 behind us and move forward. It has nothing to do
7 with favoring one side or another. The result is the
8 result.

9 You got to look at each case individually, what
10 the circumstances are. Are there certainly
11 aggravators that the State can seek moving forward
12 based on what I've heard? Sure. Is that the best
13 decision based on everything we've heard based on the
14 family being torn apart and based on the willingness
15 for him to accept responsibility?

16 I wish it was my decision to make. I really do.
17 But it's not. I -- I can't tell them what to seek or
18 not to seek. If I could, you know -- that's why
19 we're having this hearing and that's why we're 40
20 minutes into this hearing because, you know, a lot of
21 times what the law says and you know what the right
22 result is and where we should get to. And it's my
23 belief that we're not getting there today. And so
24 that's why I'm frustrated.

25 We have an opportunity to get there and we

1 haven't gotten there and we're not there. And so
2 this unfortunately is going to continue to go on and
3 we're going to continue to have more litigation, more
4 lawyers involved, when it -- it should be at a point
5 where we can make it end.

6 If I could make it end, like I said, I would
7 make it end. But the law in the State of Florida
8 does not give Judge the -- the Judge the ultimate
9 power over these kinds of decisions. Ultimately, if
10 the jury recommends, I'll have the power to make a
11 decision, but that could be, who knows, a couple more
12 years down the road and meanwhile all these other
13 people are suffering.

14 It's my job. I, you know, I show up. I do what
15 needs to be done. My responsibility is to try and
16 get these cases to a reasonable and fair conclusion,
17 which I'm attempting to do. People want to
18 criticize? Hey, I asked for it when I asked for the
19 robe. I don't care if people criticize. But I'm
20 trying to get this done in the best way for all the
21 people involved given all the circumstances that are
22 involved in this case.

23 I understand both sides can disagree. And
24 plenty of times the State's disagreed including at
25 this point with what I've done. There is literally

1 lots of times the Defense has agreed -- disagreed
2 with things I've done over the last 43 years. But
3 sometimes, as the gentleman and the young lady, I'll
4 say, had pointed out, sometimes it just has to end.
5 It just has to end. And making it continue to go on,
6 I don't know how that's in anybody's interest.

7 Because even if you get what you want, it's
8 still going to be up to me. Right? And the bottom
9 line is, it's going to be my call. Right? If you
10 get to where you want. You convict him on the first
11 one; the jury recommends when we go to the second
12 one, death; it's still going to be my call. The
13 problem is, people are going to be suffering for two
14 or three more years until we get to that point.
15 Right?

16 Is it frustrating for me? Yeah. Do I -- I --
17 Jesus. These are the days when I question why I'm
18 still sitting here 43 years' in. Right? Getting
19 ready to turn 70 years old. What in the hey am I
20 still doing sitting here after all this instead of
21 retiring and going to the mountains? But I don't
22 know. There's something about it that keeps me here
23 and keeps dragging me in. You know the line in the
24 old Godfather movie? Every time I try and get out,
25 they drag me back in. I guess that's what applies --

1 that's what applies in this situation.

2 It should end. It needs to end. But we're here
3 and the decision has been made today that it doesn't
4 end today. Hopefully, what I've said will make
5 people reconsider what this situation is and where we
6 are. I would like nothing better for everybody
7 involved in the case.

8 All things even, you want to try the case -- or
9 cases, we'll try the cases. But there are a lot of
10 people on both sides of this family that are
11 suffering from this whole result and from where we
12 are. And I -- that -- to me, that should be the
13 prime consideration of what we finally make a
14 decision based on. Not what I think. Not what
15 either side thinks. What's the best way and the most
16 compassionate way to get this whole thing resolved
17 and put it all behind us for everybody involved?

18 So I'll get off of my soapbox at this point.
19 You're going to decide whether you're conflicting off
20 and/or if somebody else is appointed in the case?
21 Yes?

22 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Correct.

23 THE COURT: So I think we should set a pretrial
24 in, what, a month to see what the final answer is as
25 far as that's concerned?

1 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Sure.

2 THE COURT: Is that a reasonable period of time?

3 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Absolutely.

4 THE COURT: All right. That will give the State
5 time to decide based on our little back and forth
6 whether they want somebody else handling this or not.

7 All right. Let's set it August 20th. We'll set
8 a pretrial on 08/20/26. That date acceptable,
9 Mr. Koskinas?

10 MR. KOSKINAS: Yes, sir. August 20th?

11 THE COURT: At 8:30 on all pending cases. And
12 we'll make some decisions procedurally and
13 substantively as how we'll move along at that point.

14 All right. Any other business to come before
15 the Court this morning?

16 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Your Honor, may I approach?

17 THE COURT: Sure.

18 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I filed another downward
19 motion this morning. Here is a copy.

20 THE COURT: Thank you. All right. We'll be in
21 recess. Thank you.

22 (Proceedings concluded.)

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

STATE OF FLORIDA

COUNTY OF PINELLAS

I, Beth Ellenwood, a digital court reporter for the Sixth Judicial Circuit, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and did transcribe the foregoing proceedings and that the transcript is a true and correct record of said proceedings.

DATED this 28th day of July, 2026.

/S Beth Ellenwood
Beth Ellenwood
Digital Court Reporter
Sixth Judicial Circuit