

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA, IN AND FOR PINELLAS COUNTY
CASE NUMBER CRC21-01099CFANO
CRC21-01513CFANO

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Plaintiff,

vs.

CORNELIUS T. WHITFIELD,

Defendant.

PROCEEDINGS: PRETRIAL HEARING

BEFORE: The Honorable Philip J. Federico
Circuit Court Judge

DATE: January 10, 2024

PLACE: Courtroom 7
Pinellas County Justice Center
14250 - 49th Street North
Clearwater, Florida 33762

REPORTER: Karen E. Roman
Registered Professional Reporter

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1 1513.

2 THE COURT: There's
3 also -- (inaudible) -- contraband, the 21 number on
4 the last page.

5 Procedurally, what's the status at this point?
6 Still working through depositions?

7 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Correct, yes.

8 THE COURT: Are you lead?

9 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I'm not. It's Ms. Manuele
10 I'm standing in for this morning. But I know that
11 she's -- taken a number of depositions. I've been
12 out of town for a couple rounds. We have at least
13 one more big round of depositions to take. So I'd
14 be asking for a reset of that pretrial for next
15 pretrial. Perhaps --

16 (SIMULTANEOUS TALKING)

17 THE COURT: Is Ms. Russell penalty phase? Are
18 you guys together?

19 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: We're all together. That's
20 how the team works.

21 THE COURT: You don't assign specific
22 responsibilities? Traditionally, there's a
23 two-person team, and one does guilt, and one does
24 penalty.

25 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I think that's very much

1 true for court appointed or private attorneys.
2 However, within our office, we do operate in a
3 different way.

4 THE COURT: The team concept?

5 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: The team concept.

6 THE COURT: All for one, one for all;
7 everybody gets involved in all aspects of it.

8 Well, I guess my question was going to be
9 directed -- we have a dual aspect situation here
10 preparing for guilt phase and then
11 contemplating -- I mean, is there a chance that
12 there's going to be kind of waiver?

13 MS. TAKTIKOS: We haven't had any offers.

14 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I mean, it's entirely
15 possible. The case in which the death penalty has
16 been sought is all family of Mr. Whitfield. So the
17 next of kin are also all family of Mr. Whitfield.

18 So we're hopeful that there may be a potential
19 resolution. However, I don't believe we're at the
20 point where we can make any kind of formal offer to
21 the State yet. So --

22 THE COURT: No. I think you got to finish the
23 depos. I guess what I'm worried about is that it's
24 a '21 case. We're into early '24. And if
25 nothing's being done on penalty even if we get done

1 with guilt phase --

2 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: That's not true.

3 THE COURT: Well, that's why I'm inquiring.

4 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Yeah. So we understand
5 that our obligation is to engage in a dual
6 investigation. Obviously, the legal defenses and
7 discovery as well as mitigation investigation.

8 And we're proceeding accordingly.

9 THE COURT: All right. So when should we get
10 together again?

11 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: My suggestion, given mine
12 and Ms. Manuele's schedules, would be in April.

13 THE COURT: All right. Is this the last round
14 of depositions you'll need for -- last significant
15 round of depositions?

16 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I believe so. I mean, I
17 will be candid with your Honor. I didn't have an
18 opportunity to speak with Ms. Manuele specifically
19 about this pretrial before coming in this morning.

20 THE COURT: I know we were here 'til seven
21 something last night picking a jury. I understand.
22 I know she was otherwise indisposed, as was I.

23 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: So my suggestion would be
24 some time late in April, the week of the 22nd, if
25 that works for the State.

1 THE COURT: April-ish. You got -- is this
2 really the last round -- significant round of depositions
3 coming up?

4 MS. TAKTIKOS: That's my understanding, yes.
5 We've had two other significant rounds. So I'm
6 hoping this will be the last. And so at the next
7 pretrial, we'll be setting one or more of these for
8 trial, so...

9 THE COURT: Well, all right. What day of the
10 week? Wednesdays are good?

11 MS. TAKTIKOS: Preferably not a Wednesday,
12 your Honor. I'm free every other day except for
13 Wednesday.

14 THE COURT: April 16th or April 18th, any of
15 those good?

16 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I'm not certain about
17 Ms. Manuele's calendar, but I think at the moment,
18 either one is fine for us.

19 THE COURT: The 1st, 16th or 18th?

20 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: How about the 18th?

21 THE COURT: That okay with you?

22 MS. TAKTIKOS: That's fine, your Honor.

23 THE COURT: 4/18/24 for the next pretrial at
24 8:30 on all three numbers.

25 Speedy's been waived previously, right?

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MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Yes.

THE COURT: Thank you.

(PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED)

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF FLORIDA)

COUNTY OF PINELLAS)

I, Karen E. Roman, Registered Professional Reporter,
certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically
report the foregoing proceedings and that the transcript
is a true record.

DATED this 26th day of February, 2025.

/s Karen E. Roman
Karen E. Roman
Registered Professional Reporter