

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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**APPEARING ON BEHALF OF  
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**APPEARING ON BEHALF OF  
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THE COURT: I got a whole crew here.

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Mr. Cornelius Whitfield.

MS. TAKTIKOS: And good morning, your Honor.

Theodora Taktikos --

THE COURT: I ordered him. Do we need him over?

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: I don't think so.

THE COURT: This is just under the guise of procedural -- move things along, not talking about substance, our little carved-out exception --

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: So presumptive.

THE COURT: -- death penalty guy showing up for every hearing, right?

MS. TAKTIKOS: Yes.

THE COURT: Madam Court Reporter's here. She showed up. Thank you, madam court reporter.

MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Yes.

THE COURT: Whitfield 21-01099; murder one, attempted murder, robbery and 21-01513 is three first degree murders and an attempted murder.

The reason for the court reporter is the State, at this point, have suggested they're seeking the death penalty, right?

MS. TAKTIKOS: Yes, your Honor. That's on

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 depositions. 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