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IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA, IN AND FOR PINELLAS COUNTY  
CASE NUMBERS 2101513CFANO  
2101099CFANO

STATE OF FLORIDA,  
  
Plaintiff,  
vs.  
  
CORNELIUS WHITFIELD,  
  
Defendant.

\_\_\_\_\_ /

PROCEEDINGS:           PRETRIAL  
  
BEFORE                   THE HONORABLE PHILIP FEDERICO  
                              Circuit Court Judge  
  
DATE:                    April 18, 2024  
  
PLACE:                   Courtroom 7  
                              Pinellas County Justice Center  
                              14250 - 49th Street North  
                              Clearwater, Florida 33762  
  
REPORTER:               Michael McDaniel  
                              Certified Merit Reporter

(Pages 1 to 23)  
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\* \* \*

## P R O C E E D I N G S

1  
2 THE COURT: All right. We are here on State  
3 of Florida versus Cornelius Whitfield, case number  
4 21-01099, is a murder first degree, attempt murder  
5 first, robbery: 21-01513 is three counts of murder  
6 in the first degree and attempt murder in the first  
7 degree. He's also got an intro of contraband on  
8 21-08749.

9 Obviously, the court reporter is here.

10 The State has been indicating that they're  
11 seeking death previously, right?

12 MR. KOSKINAS: Correct.

13 THE COURT: And that hasn't changed?

14 MR. KOSKINAS: That has not.

15 THE COURT: All right. So I guess we're  
16 talking about where we are in the discovery  
17 process?

18 MS. MANUELE: Yes, your Honor. We have -- and  
19 since we were here last we have made some  
20 significant progress in the mitigation area. We  
21 are working on getting some finalized reports  
22 together to send to the State regarding them  
23 seeking the death penalty. We would ask for about  
24 a three-month reset so that we could give that to  
25 the State and give them enough time to consider.

1           MR. KOSKINAS: I think the last time we set  
2 this was -- maybe I'm wrong, but I thought we were  
3 going to set one of the cases for trial on today's  
4 date.

5           THE COURT: Where are you on guilt phase or is  
6 that --

7           MS. MANUELE: We -- we have -- as far as guilt  
8 phase on the death penalty, we have not done much  
9 in that way. We have done some of the discovery on  
10 the case that they're not seeking the death penalty  
11 on. However, I could tell your Honor our focus has  
12 been mitigation these last few months. So we have  
13 not done --

14          THE COURT: So if we're talking trials,  
15 eventually, given that we have two different  
16 numbers and two different sets of charges, tell me  
17 about how you would envision that working.

18          MR. KOSKINAS: The one that they have just  
19 indicated that they have done discovery on or done  
20 some investigation on is the one that we need to  
21 set first. That's not the one that we are seeking  
22 death on. That's the 10 -- 01099.

23          THE COURT: So what's the facts alleged -- a  
24 thumbnail on that?

25          MR. KOSKINAS: On that one?

1 THE COURT: Yeah.

2 MR. KOSKINAS: Robbery. He robs his high  
3 school -- his middle school friend, goes in and  
4 kills one of them, tries to kill the other, shoots  
5 him in the face. That one lives.

6 THE COURT: Is that over a dope deal?

7 MR. KOSKINAS: No. He's just desperate for  
8 money and --

9 THE COURT: And that happens first in time?

10 MR. KOSKINAS: It does.

11 THE COURT: And then the three murders and the  
12 attempt murder, what is that and how long is that  
13 after the first one?

14 MR. KOSKINAS: A couple of weeks after. It's  
15 his family members. He goes -- his mother  
16 survives. Shoots his mother, shoots his other  
17 family members. Three of them die in the house.  
18 Officers respond. She indicates exactly what  
19 happened.

20 THE COURT: And is there some lead up to that  
21 or some family issues that are going on?

22 MR. KOSKINAS: No. I think the lead up is he  
23 has committed the previous murder, and he's just  
24 unhinged.

25 THE COURT: Unhinged being a word that you

1 probably could agree with in that dissertation, I  
2 suppose, for different reasons than perhaps he  
3 thinks.

4 MS. MANUELE: Judge, there is certainly  
5 evidence that he was experiencing some mental  
6 health issues, that he had recently been released  
7 from prison. A number of people indicate that he  
8 had been acting different and out of character in  
9 the weeks leading up to this.

10 THE COURT: So from your perspective, we are  
11 going to have to have two trials?

12 MR. KOSKINAS: I think so, yeah.

13 THE COURT: And from your perspective you  
14 would like to have no trials?

15 MS. MANUELE: Correct, and if we end up in  
16 trial posture, I would agree we would have to have  
17 two, but, ideally, we would have no trials.

18 THE COURT: Oh, boy.

19 MR. KOSKINAS: They could continue to do the  
20 mitigation all they want on the other one. I'm not  
21 asking to set that for trial, but, you know, we are  
22 going to have to do two trials here. We should get  
23 the first one on the books, in my opinion.

24 THE COURT: So the evidence in the first one  
25 is going to be the surviving witness?

1           MR. KOSKINAS: That is one of the brothers,  
2           yes. That is part of the evidence.

3           THE COURT: Are there other witnesses around  
4           when that happened?

5           MR. KOSKINAS: No. There's another -- so  
6           there are events that led up to that -- to that  
7           incident. There was another brother that was there  
8           earlier in the day. This defendant contacted that  
9           other brother, indicated his desperate need for  
10          money. So, ultimately, the other brother invited  
11          him over to that location. This is a known drug  
12          area and individuals that are known to deal with  
13          drugs.

14          THE COURT: Any statements from Mr. Whitfield  
15          or anything from that or any science that's  
16          involved or is this just mostly witness testimony  
17          on the first one?

18          MR. KOSKINAS: Witness testimony.

19          THE COURT: So, realistically, when are you  
20          going to have your penalty phase stuff done that  
21          you can make a pitch to Bartlett? I don't want to  
22          necessarily try the first case until we know  
23          whether they are going to be willing to entertain  
24          anything short of where they are headed at this  
25          point?

1 MS. MANUELE: We had asked our experts to get  
2 us a somewhat final report by the beginning of June  
3 so that we could try to get that out to the State  
4 by July.

5 THE COURT: Realistically, if that fails and  
6 you're having to try the first case as preparatory  
7 to the ultimate trial, how much time would you need  
8 post June to get ready for that?

9 MS. MANUELE: Significant time.

10 THE COURT: I know all three of you are -- I  
11 mean, you're pretty much it for the capital team,  
12 right?

13 MS. MANUELE: Right.

14 THE COURT: I mean, you are the whole capital  
15 team in this Sixth Circuit. So I recognize the  
16 difficulty of that because I -- you know, I mean --  
17 it's not your fault. I can't -- I mean, there's no  
18 blame to be assigned. It's just, you know, we have  
19 lost a lot of experienced people over the last  
20 several years and there's not a lot of people that  
21 can handle these kind of cases. Unfortunately,  
22 you're split between, what, seven or eight  
23 courtrooms in the building on all of those cases?

24 MS. MANUELE: Right.

25 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: And the other counties as



1 well.

2 MS. MANUELE: Oh, yeah, and Pasco County. We  
3 work for Pasco County, too.

4 THE COURT: And Pasco, too?

5 MS. MANUELE: Yes.

6 THE COURT: So you're between what? What's  
7 there four or five courtrooms in Pasco?

8 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: There are only two,  
9 thankfully.

10 THE COURT: So you only have got about ten  
11 courtrooms to cover in two different counties as  
12 far as death cases are concerned; that shouldn't be  
13 any problem?

14 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: No big deal.

15 THE COURT: I mean, should we set that later  
16 in the year then for trial? I mean, I don't know.  
17 I'm just trying to spitball here. I'm trying to  
18 make everybody happy today. They get a date and  
19 then you guys have enough time to try to do what  
20 you need to do as far as getting that ready.

21 Is that the victim's family? Is that somebody  
22 from that --

23 MR. KOSKINAS: No.

24 THE MOTHER: I'm his mother. I'm the victim's  
25 mother.

1 MR. KOSKINAS: Okay.

2 THE COURT: Okay. Does she have some input  
3 she wants to give?

4 MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, I haven't spoken to her  
5 and I didn't -- nobody indicated to me that she was  
6 here.

7 Yes, ma'am?

8 THE MOTHER: Judge, I'm not being funny. I  
9 understand all the difficulties with everything,  
10 Judge, I promise you. I just -- what I'm trying to  
11 say, Judge, I know everybody got to be fair.  
12 That's all I'm asking you, Judge, is you-all just  
13 get my son out the way. He going -- he going to  
14 plead when he going to plead. You-all do what  
15 you're going to do. Stop -- oh, I've been coming  
16 to this courtroom every -- I have been to every  
17 last one of these for the last three years, and  
18 then -- I'm not being funny. Seem like it's funny  
19 to them. That was my only child, and he wasn't  
20 perfect, but you-all, please, please -- he got --  
21 growing up to be a good kid. He wasn't perfect,  
22 but you-all, please, get this together and stop the  
23 pain. I feel the pain every time I come here. I  
24 feel his pain.

25 THE COURT: Well --

1           THE MOTHER: And he did what he did, and  
2           that's the end of it. If you-all give him life, if  
3           he plead, just get it over with and stop having us  
4           have to come and feel his pain every day, and he  
5           was -- because he was a good boy. He was. He  
6           wasn't perfect, and it wasn't his fault, but some  
7           of the things that my son chose, but he was good.  
8           He was good to him. And that's all I'm asking you,  
9           Judge, you-all, if they say twenty, just get it --  
10          I am willing to get this over with so we can live  
11          and I don't have to keep feeling this every time,  
12          suppress this. You-all stop playing. And he did  
13          what he did. If he didn't, he didn't, but get it.  
14          I'm willing to get it over with because I know God  
15          will handle this. That's where I'm at with this.  
16          God got him.

17          THE COURT: All right.

18          THE MOTHER: So he went from my son case to  
19          his people case. That's totally different. Get my  
20          child, my child out of this. You-all, just please  
21          let it go to rest and stop be prolonging it,  
22          please. I'm begging you.

23          THE COURT: All right. I understand the  
24          sentiment you're expressing, and, frankly,  
25          personally, I don't disagree with that sentiment,

1 but, legally, this is a different kind of case. I  
2 know you don't want to hear that, but in a death  
3 penalty case, it's treated differently than any  
4 other case that we have --

5 THE MOTHER: Yes, sir.

6 THE COURT: -- because the State is seeking  
7 to, you know, have him executed, and so they are --  
8 we have to -- and because of the complications and  
9 the way this is set up, they're going to use the  
10 first case to try and aggravate the second case to  
11 convince the jury that he should receive a death  
12 sentence. Obviously, the Defense wants him to  
13 plead to life and be able to resolve it and not  
14 have the death penalty -- well, I don't know, maybe  
15 I'm assuming that, but I think they recognize the  
16 State is not taking anything less than life given  
17 the number of lives that have been lost in that  
18 situation. So I think they're trying to convince  
19 the State to do that and come to an agreement and  
20 resolve the whole thing.

21 If I could, I would -- I would put my -- or  
22 use my influence to come up with that, but,  
23 frankly, I can't. It's a decision that they have  
24 to be able to agree to. I just can't off the top  
25 of my head say, you know what, you're waiving death

1 and we are going to give him life and that's the  
2 end of it. The State is entitled to seek it.  
3 They're wanting to do everything they can to defend  
4 him to make sure that's not what happens. You  
5 know, if they want to offer -- if you -- are you in  
6 a position that you are going to give the  
7 mitigation and offer life or where are we at on  
8 that, or are you not in a position to say at this  
9 point?

10 MS. MANUELE: We're not in a position to say.

11 THE COURT: All right. So she's -- she's a  
12 mom of which victim?

13 MR. KOSKINAS: That must be Miss Barnes.

14 THE MOTHER: Yes, sir.

15 MR. KOSKINAS: Yes. In the first case that  
16 I'm asking to set for trial, Judge, the victim is  
17 Darren Barnes. That's his mother.

18 THE COURT: I mean, these cases -- you know, I  
19 know you don't want to hear stories, but, I mean,  
20 we're -- Ms. Russell and I are 16 years in on this  
21 other guy that got death and should he have gotten  
22 death. He was intellectually disabled, not, and it  
23 wasn't raised. I mean, these cases -- I'm sorry to  
24 tell you -- and I'm just hoping that at some point  
25 we can come to a resolution short of having to try

1           these cases, because if we try one and then the  
2           other and then there's a death reck, you know, I  
3           fear that what you're hoping for as far as a final  
4           answer may -- may be farther off than what you  
5           really are hoping for in this whole situation, and  
6           I understand the pain that you're going through and  
7           until it's resolved, you're still suffering through  
8           all of this, and I understand that, which is why  
9           I'm doing my best after been doing this for 40-some  
10          years to get to a resolution, and that's what I'm  
11          talking to them about and trying to be the most  
12          efficient that we can with time and resources to  
13          get to that point.

14                 So the suffering and what you've expressed is  
15          not lost on any of us. These cases are difficult  
16          for just that reason, plus a bunch of other  
17          reasons, but all I can tell you is we're pedaling  
18          as fast as we can and we're doing the best that we  
19          can under the circumstance.

20                 THE MOTHER: Yes, sir.

21                 THE COURT: And we'll continue to try to do  
22          that. So I'm sorry that you're suffering through  
23          this and I understand why it's difficult for you.  
24          These cases are never easy. Having done, I don't  
25          know, dozens of them over the years, they're never

1 easy cases for anybody that is involved in the  
2 situation.

3 Why don't we set, I don't know, what month are  
4 you thinking of on the first one?

5 MR. KOSKINAS: The Court's -- the Court's  
6 pleasure with the State.

7 THE COURT: I mean, you're thinking how long  
8 on mit -- you tell me for your mitigation report,  
9 June-ish?

10 MS. MANUELE: We were hoping -- we had asked  
11 everybody to get us their final reports by June so  
12 that we could put everything together.

13 THE COURT: And to get it to Bartlett  
14 hopefully by July?

15 MS. MANUELE: Yes.

16 THE COURT: So what are you thinking, maybe  
17 October-ish we could set a trial or is that going  
18 to run up against whatever your guys' schedules  
19 are?

20 MR. KOSKINAS: Yeah, that does. I have a  
21 different murder set the end of October.

22 THE COURT: All right. Well, let's look for a  
23 date that we can coordinate through four calendars.  
24 Who is doing it with you?

25 MR. KOSKINAS: Miss Danzig.

1           THE COURT: I mean, this -- the first one,  
2           since it's not death penalty -- I mean, it's  
3           obviously a first degree murder. We can start on a  
4           Monday and I assume we can finish it by either  
5           Thursday or Friday?

6           MR. KOSKINAS: Absolutely. I don't see any  
7           reason why that wouldn't be the case.

8           THE COURT: It doesn't make sense to try it  
9           unless we know the absolute answer to what their  
10          request is going to be. So I want to give them at  
11          least to July to be able get their entreaties to  
12          Mr. Bartlett in hope that -- if that's successful,  
13          then we know we're done by then. If it's not, then  
14          obviously we have to try this one and then sometime  
15          next year, we'll have to try the one where there  
16          are different victims other than her son that we  
17          talked about this morning.

18          MR. KOSKINAS: Judge, I can do early -- or the  
19          beginning to middle of September, or November --  
20          the second half of November.

21          THE COURT: The middle of September is a  
22          problem for me because -- you mean the week of the  
23          16th?

24          MR. KOSKINAS: I could do that.

25          THE COURT: I'm at a conference that week, so



1 I can't do that.

2 MR. KOSKINAS: That's fine. I mean, I can do  
3 November.

4 MS. MANUELE: We are looking at 2025.

5 THE COURT: You guys got nothing in '24?

6 MS. MANUELE: No, sir.

7 THE COURT: What month in '25?

8 MS. MANUELE: I'm trying --

9 THE COURT: I know you already squeezed one in  
10 with me on something else.

11 MS. RUSSELL: And I'm trying to -- I'm trying  
12 to resqueeze it to a time that I'm not  
13 double-booked in February.

14 THE COURT: I know.

15 MS. RUSSELL: And that's the two weeks in  
16 February. I just have to run it by Miss  
17 Constantine and Judge Matthey on the 23rd of April.  
18 So I will know by next Tuesday, but March,  
19 potentially.

20 THE COURT: What week in March? It's probably  
21 good we're at least getting it set now, given the  
22 schedules that we're talking about.

23 You got five Mondays in March next year,  
24 three, ten, 17, 24, 31. Any of them?

25 MR. KOSKINAS: This really isn't a complicated

1 case, the first one, Judge.

2 THE COURT: I know. The problem is they're  
3 the cap team for two counties. I mean, I can't  
4 tell them -- you know, then I start cannibalizing  
5 other judges and saying my case is more important  
6 than theirs, right?

7 MR. KOSKINAS: It is.

8 THE COURT: What?

9 MR. KOSKINAS: It is.

10 THE COURT: I know, but --

11 MR. KOSKINAS: It is.

12 THE COURT: You know when somebody else was  
13 the 30-year Judge and I was the four-year Judge, I  
14 didn't like getting cannibalized by those guys,  
15 right, I've been here longer. My case is taking  
16 precedence over you.

17 MR. KOSKINAS: Well, it's not --

18 THE COURT: I'm not trying to big time them  
19 now that I'm the guy that's been here forever,  
20 right?

21 MR. KOSKINAS: I'm not talking about  
22 seniority. I'm talking about just an actual  
23 individual case. Obviously, it is different as the  
24 Court has just announced.

25 THE COURT: Every capital case in this circuit

1 they're handling, right? I mean, that's -- and not  
2 only in Pinellas but in Pasco. I mean, until we  
3 get another team that can cut the time in half,  
4 that's the time frame that you're talking about.  
5 We need three more lawyers that can handle these  
6 cases, at least, so then you can cut six months off  
7 of what all the time frames are that we're talking  
8 about.

9 Do you have a date in March?

10 MS. MANUELE: March 24th.

11 THE COURT: Sure.

12 I assume you don't have anything then, right?

13 MR. KOSKINAS: Right.

14 THE COURT: So on 21-01099, we are going to  
15 set a trial for 3/24 of '25. Let me set a  
16 pretrial -- what do you want, something in July?

17 MS. MANUELE: Maybe the beginning of August.

18 THE COURT: Okay. By then you're going to  
19 have hopefully an answer from Mr. Bartlett on it?

20 MS. MANUELE: Yes. Hopefully everything from  
21 the State and hopefully an answer.

22 THE COURT: All right. Let me see in August  
23 when we are talking about. Let me see what I have  
24 got.

25 I'm gone the week of the 5th. I'm here the

1 week of the 12th in August, like that Wednesday or  
2 Thursday, either 14th or 15th?

3 MS. MANUELE: Which do you care?

4 THE COURT: Preference?

5 MR. KOSKINAS: August?

6 THE COURT: Okay.

7 MR. KOSKINAS: I'm sorry. I was just --

8 THE COURT: 14th or 15th. I think school is  
9 starting that week. I don't know if anybody has  
10 any kid problems, 14th or 15th?

11 MR. KOSKINAS: 14th.

12 THE COURT: 14th good?

13 MR. KOSKINAS: I will be in Ireland on the  
14 15th.

15 THE COURT: Huh?

16 MR. KOSKINAS: I will be in Ireland on the  
17 15th.

18 THE COURT: Excellent.

19 MR. KOSKINAS: So the 14th.

20 THE COURT: All right. 8/14 for a pretrial.  
21 Try and get everything in and get to Bartlett. If  
22 we're able to resolve it, then we can do it on that  
23 day. If we're not, then obviously you have got  
24 enough time to get the trial ready on the first one  
25 and then we can talk about what we're going to do

1 on the second one as well.

2 So we'll set a pretrial on everything -- well,  
3 on the second case, we'll set a pretrial for that  
4 3/24 date in '25, and we'll also set both of them  
5 for pretrial as I said on August 14th, with the  
6 hope that after they get everything in, we can talk  
7 about a resolution. If not, then we'll figure out  
8 what is next besides the trial date we have already  
9 set.

10 Okay. Anything else this morning that we need  
11 to address?

12 MS. MANUELE: I don't believe so.

13 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: No, your Honor.

14 THE COURT: Okay.

15 MR. KOSKINAS: Thank you, Judge.

16 THE COURT: I appreciate it.

17 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Thank you, your Honor.

18 THE COURT: Okay.

19 MS. RUSSELL: Thank you.

20 THE COURT: You want to talk to her on the way  
21 out and give her a little more info.

22 MR. KOSKINAS: Absolutely.

23 THE COURT: Okay.

24 MR. KOSKINAS: That is absolutely my plan.

25 THE COURT: Okay.

1 MR. KOSKINAS: Thank you.

2 THE COURT: Thank you. I appreciate it.

3 THE MOTHER: Thank you.

4 THE COURT: Thank you, ma'am.

5 (HEARING CONCLUDED)

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**CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER**

STATE OF FLORIDA     )

COUNTY OF PINELLAS    )

I, ROBIN FRALEY, REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL REPORTER,  
certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically  
transcribe the foregoing proceedings and that the  
transcript is a true record.

DATED this 12th day of March, 2025.

***ROBIN FRALEY***  
REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL REPORTER