R. v. Peterson, 2017 NWTSC 58 S-1-CR-2017-000048

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

IN THE MATTER OF:

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

- v -

BILLY FRED TOMMY PETERSON

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Transcript of the Oral Decision on s. 525 Bail Review

delivered by The Honourable Justice L. A. Charbonneau,

sitting in Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories, on

the 17th day of July, 2017.

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APPEARANCES:

Ms. A. Piché: Counsel for the Crown

Mr. T. Boyd: Counsel for the Accused

(Charges under s. 90(2), 92(2), 95(2), 117.01(3) x2 of

the Criminal Code)

An Order of the Court has been made prohibiting publication,

broadcast or transmission of information contained herein

pursuant to s.517, s.520(9) and s.525(8) of the Criminal Code

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1 THE COURT: You can have a seat with your

2 counsel.

3 Before I give my decision on this, I want to

4 reiterate that there is a publication ban in

5 effect that prevents publication of any

6 information provided during the course of the

7 hearing this morning, including the submissions

8 and the allegations, and it applies to what I am

9 about to say.

10 Mr. Peterson is awaiting trial on a

11 five-count Indictment. Last April he had a show

12 cause hearing before a Justice of the Peace and

13 was ordered detained. He has now applied to this

14 Court for a review of that decision. He is also

15 now eligible for a 90-day review. This is as of

16 a few days ago, and so this morning Crown and

17 defence agreed that the hearing that we had this

18 morning could also be treated as a mandatory

19 review under Section 525 of the Criminal Code.

20 The allegations are that Mr. Peterson was

21 arrested by police on April 15th, 2016. They saw

22 him walking on a road in Inuvik. They were aware

23 that a warrant was outstanding for his arrest in

24 relation to a charge of assault causing bodily

25 harm.

26 Mr. Peterson was arrested without incident

27 and was cooperative. He was searched in a

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1 cursory way and then placed in the back of the

2 police vehicle. The officers then heard a noise

3 in the back of the vehicle and, when they

4 checked, they found a Glock .40-calibre handgun

5 on the floor in the back of the vehicle in the

6 area where Mr. Peterson was. That handgun was

7 not loaded. Police then conducted a further

8 search of Mr. Peterson and, in his work coat,

9 they found a .40-calibre clip magazine with

10 ammunition in it.

11 At the time, Mr. Peterson was prohibited

12 from being in possession of firearms and

13 ammunition. A prohibition order had been made

14 against him in July 2009 as part of a sentencing

15 on a charge of assault causing bodily harm and

16 that order was to be in force until ten years

17 following his release from imprisonment on that

18 sentence. There is no question that that order

19 was in force in April 2016.

20 Mr. Peterson has been committed to stand

21 trial arising from these allegations and he

22 faces, now, five charges: one for carrying a

23 concealed weapon (s. 90(2) of the Code);

24 possession of a prohibited device (s. 92(2) of

25 the Code); possession of a restricted firearm

26 together with ammunition, (s. 95(2) of the Code);

27 and possession of the firearm while prohibited

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1 and possession of ammunition while prohibited (s.

2 117.01(3) of the Code).

3 At the show cause hearing that was held last

4 April, the release plan was that there would be a

5 surety, Mr. Peterson's common-law spouse, and a

6 pledge of $500, without deposit, in support of

7 his release.

8 The plan presented at that time showed that

9 there was a good chance that Mr. Peterson would

10 be able to have employment if released. It was

11 not 100-percent confirmed at the time, but it

12 appeared to be a good possibility. A number of

13 conditions were proposed at that time.

14 The submissions presented at the show cause

15 hearing included references to his personal

16 circumstances, including the fact that he and his

17 spouse have an infant child. There was also

18 mention of his very good work history and

19 employability. It was pointed out at that time

20 that the allegations do not include any

21 reference, suggestion or evidence that he is

22 affiliated with gangs, nor anything particularly

23 sinister in conjunction with the firearm that was

24 seized, aside from the fact that it is a

25 restricted weapon.

26 At that show cause hearing, the Crown

27 opposed release on the secondary and tertiary

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1 ground. The Crown did not have any issues with

2 the suitability of the proposed surety. Its

3 concerns were really based on the very long

4 criminal record that Mr. Peterson has, which

5 includes numerous convictions for crimes of

6 violence and numerous convictions for offences

7 against the administration of justice. These

8 include, notably, several breaches of court

9 orders. The Crown expressed concern, as well,

10 about the nature of the firearm seized,

11 distinguishing this case from the situation, for

12 example, were a hunting rifle might be the weapon

13 concerned.

14 The Justice of the Peace ultimately agreed

15 with the Crown's position. He found the surety

16 to be a reasonably strong surety, but he did note

17 that Mr. Peterson was living with her when he

18 committed his last offence. This last offence is

19 the assault causing bodily harm that he was being

20 arrested for that day, for which he was

21 ultimately convicted and sentenced. The Justice

22 of the Peace concluded that Mr. Peterson had not

23 met his onus and ordered his detention.

24 The release plan that is being presented now

25 is similar to the one that was presented to the

26 Justice of the Peace. Mr. Peterson's common-law

27 is being offered as a surety. This time a cash

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1 deposit is offered in the amount of $500. The

2 proposed employer is not the same as the one that

3 was mentioned at the April show cause hearing,

4 but there is an exhibit to Mr. Peterson's

5 affidavit that shows that there is now a firm

6 employment offer for him if he is released. It

7 appears to be virtually certain that Mr. Peterson

8 will be employed if he is released, which is

9 stronger or more firm than what was the case in

10 April.

11 Mr. Peterson's counsel has argued that

12 because of the offer for cash deposit and the

13 firmness of the job offer, this plan is stronger

14 than the earlier one and this is a change in

15 circumstances that opens up the door to review by

16 this Court under the framework set down in R. v.

17 St-Cloud, 2015 SCC 27. Defence also argues that

18 the additional passage of time since the April

19 show cause hearing and the fact that there still

20 is no trial date set are also things that are

21 different from the situation that existed when

22 the Justice of the Peace made his decision. That

23 issue of delay fits within the main submission,

24 really, that was presented this morning on

25 Mr. Peterson's behalf, that his continued

26 detention could result in him spending more time

27 in custody than what he will be sentenced for if

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1 he is found guilty.

2 The last aspect of this application which is

3 somewhat unusual is that in his affidavit

4 Mr. Peterson deposes that the Justice of the

5 Peace who heard the show cause hearing has a past

6 connection with him. I am going to quote from

7 the affidavit itself. At paragraphs 14 and 15,

8 Mr. Peterson deposes:

9 After the hearing was completed, I

mentioned to my lawyer that there

10 was a history between the

presiding JP and myself. We

11 attended the same school in Inuvik

and there were several incidents

12 where I bullied Mr. Anderson in

the playground when his father was

13 principal. My lawyer has

explained that we could have asked

14 the JP to refuse to hear my case

if this information was known

15 before April 13. I have not seen

Mr. Anderson for many years and it

16 took me some time to make the

connection.

17

18 What I understood from the submissions I

19 heard this morning is that the defence is arguing

20 that this should be taken into account, not so

21 much from the issue of actual bias, but from the

22 point of view of there being a possibility of a

23 perception of bias, that Mr. Peterson has a

24 perception that perhaps the original hearing may

25 not have been entirely fair given his connection

26 with the Justice of the Peace. That aspect of

27 things does not fall neatly in any of the

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1 categories of things identified in St-Cloud as

2 opening the door to review by this Court.

3 This past connection was not raised before

4 the Justice of the Peace, so we cannot even be

5 sure that the Justice of the Peace realized that

6 he knew Mr. Peterson from the past, especially

7 considering that Mr. Peterson deposes that he

8 himself did not make the connection right away

9 either. There is no suggestion that the Justice

10 of the Peace should have recused himself or erred

11 in hearing the matter in the first place. Where

12 it fits best is probably under the "change in

13 circumstances" heading, although in this case it

14 would be more in the nature of new circumstances

15 being brought to the attention of this Court and

16 calling into question something about the

17 fairness of the first hearing.

18 This morning the Crown took the position

19 that this connection is entirely irrelevant. I

20 am not certain I would go that far. Although

21 there is no indication that this was brought to

22 the attention of the Justice of the Peace, and we

23 do not know if he was aware of it, as defence

24 counsel pointed out, our law is often concerned

25 as much about potential perception of bias as it

26 is with actual bias. This is not the case for me

27 to decide whether this, standing alone, would

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1 open the door to review, but I think it is

2 something that goes into the overall assessment.

3 Given the fact that a cash deposit is now being

4 offered, combined with the now firm offer for

5 employment, and combined with this potential

6 concern about a perception of bias, I have

7 decided that the safest and fairest course is for

8 me to re-examine the issue of whether detention

9 is necessary to make sure that any lingering

10 issues are put to rest.

11 The primary ground is not a concern, so I am

12 not going to address it. The other two grounds

13 are what is of concern to the Crown and they are

14 also what is of concern to the Court.

15 The plan is probably as strong as it could

16 be, and as was noted by the Crown this morning,

17 and it was very ably and persuasively presented

18 by defence counsel.

19 The Crown has conceded that the surety is

20 suitable and that there are no issues with the

21 employment being lined up. There is little doubt

22 that having Mr. Peterson working would be better

23 for his family than having him sit in remand. I

24 also realize that having a young child and not

25 being able to be there to parent that child is

26 probably very difficult both for Mr. Peterson and

27 for his spouse, and it is not good for the child

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1 either to be without a parent, if that can be

2 avoided.

3 At the same time, though, there is an

4 extensive criminal record here. It starts in

5 1995 and there was a conviction as recently as

6 July 2016. That recent conviction for assault

7 causing bodily harm gave rise to a significant

8 jail term. There are a lot of convictions for

9 crimes of violence, and this always raises

10 concerns about public safety. There is a large

11 number of breaches of court orders. There are

12 convictions for breaches of recognizances,

13 undertakings, probation orders, driving

14 prohibitions, and the allegations here involve

15 the failure to comply with the court order as

16 well - the firearms prohibition.

17 The combination of a long list of

18 convictions for crimes of violence and a long

19 list of convictions for failures to comply with

20 court orders is not a good mix when the Court is

21 asked to consider public safety. It is very

22 difficult for me to have any confidence that any

23 conditions that I would impose with a view of

24 protecting the public would be followed, given

25 the stead pattern of non-compliance with court

26 orders.

27 I also think there are concerns under the

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1 tertiary ground. The allegations on their face

2 are serious and the Crown's case appears strong.

3 The arrest was effected on the strength of a

4 warrant. The initial search incident to arrest

5 must have been very cursory indeed since the

6 weapon and ammunition were not even discovered at

7 first. So I have a hard time seeing any basis

8 for any kind of Charter argument that could be

9 raised about the arrest, although, obviously, the

10 matter has not been litigated.

11 I cannot overlook the fact that defence

12 counsel this morning talked about what he

13 anticipates the defence may present when this

14 matter proceeds. He presented it with a view of

15 showing that, at best, this offence would fall at

16 the low end of the spectrum of seriousness as far

17 as these types of offences go. As I said during

18 my exchange with counsel this morning in

19 recognizing that this has not been litigated yet,

20 what has been presented this morning does not

21 appear to me to raise a defence to any of the

22 charges that Mr. Peterson faces. So while he

23 does benefit from the presumption of innocence,

24 the case against him appears very strong. Taken

25 at its highest, what I have heard this morning

26 may be mitigating as far as the level of

27 seriousness of the offence, but it is difficult

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1 to see how it would offer a defence to the charge

2 of being in possession of the item in question.

3 All of that goes to the strength of the

4 Crown's case, which is one of the things that the

5 Code refers to specifically as a factor to

6 consider when examining the tertiary ground.

7 Some of the other factors mentioned are more

8 difficult to assess because they do depend on

9 findings of facts that would be made in the event

10 of conviction. For example, findings of facts

11 about how Mr. Peterson came to be in possession

12 of this firearm would fall under the heading

13 "circumstances of the commission of the offense".

14 Those findings of facts would also be linked to

15 the gravity of the offence and they would have an

16 impact on the potential length of any term of

17 imprisonment that could be imposed. And at this

18 stage, I cannot say much about any of those

19 things, including what the likely sentence would

20 be, because those facts have not been found. But

21 I do think that members of an informed and

22 reasonable public would have grave concerns if

23 someone with this kind of criminal record, facing

24 these charges, involving this type of firearm,

25 and in the face of what appears to be a very

26 strong case, were to be released into the

27 community. I am not satisfied that Mr. Peterson

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1 has met his onus on either the secondary or

2 tertiary ground and, in that respect, although I

3 have taken a fresh look at matters, I reach the

4 same conclusion that the Justice of the Peace did.

5 With respect to the Section 525 review, at

6 this point it cannot be said that this matter has

7 been unduly delayed, and I do not find that

8 Mr. Peterson has showed that release would be

9 justified under that provision either.

10 There is a further pre-trial conference on

11 this that is scheduled for next week. It will

12 not be proceeding before me. Counsel have

13 confirmed that they want to use that as a blended

14 "trial management" and "settlement" pre-trial

15 conference. I will let the judge know that that

16 is what counsel want.

17 I want to go back to something that I

18 alluded to a little bit just now and more so this

19 morning when I was having my exchange with

20 counsel about the types of issues that the

21 defence expects to raise on this case. I am not

22 going to repeat all of that now, but I will just

23 say this, and I want to emphasize Mr. Peterson

24 has every right to have a trial if that is what

25 he wishes, he is entitled to put the Crown to the

26 proof of its case, and he has the right to have

27 this done within the process of a trial before a

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1 jury if that is what he wishes. Nothing I say

2 now should be interpreted as suggesting that he

3 does not have that right, and I am confident that

4 Mr. Boyd, who is a very experienced defence

5 counsel, will be able to make that very clear to

6 Mr. Peterson. The reality is that scheduling a

7 jury trial is more challenging than scheduling

8 other types of hearings and for a few reasons.

9 The first is that more court time is needed to do

10 a jury trial, so that gives the Court less

11 flexibility in scheduling.

12 So as I heard emphasized this morning that

13 delay was a concern here, I reiterate that it may

14 be worthwhile for other options to be seriously

15 considered. In particular, if the central areas

16 of dispute between the parties have to do with

17 facts that do not go to the essential elements of

18 the offences charged but go to things that would

19 be aggravating or mitigating on sentencing, if

20 that is what is at the heart of the issue between

21 the parties, that opens up even more options,

22 procedurally speaking, for scheduling this

23 matter. I offer those comments simply because

24 the Court schedule is filling up quickly. We

25 have a large number of jury elections in this

26 jurisdiction. That has always been the case.

27 And although we do everything we can to have

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1 matters scheduled as quickly as we can, there are

2 very real practical limitations to what we are

3 able to do. All of these things need to be

4 discussed first and foremost between Mr. Boyd and

5 Mr. Peterson, and depending on how those

6 discussions go, perhaps they can be the subject

7 of discussion between counsel before or during

8 the next pre-trial conference.

9 I make these comments perhaps more as part

10 of the 525 bail review. The Code says that when

11 a judge does not release on a 525 review, that

12 judge may give directions to expedite matters. I

13 certainly will do everything that I can to

14 schedule this quickly if it is possible. But one

15 of the things that I am going to suggest is,

16 subject to what the presiding judge at the

17 pre-trial conference says, that if by the end of

18 that pre-trial conference it is confirmed that

19 this matter is going to be going to trial, the

20 mode of trial should be firmed up so we know what

21 we are looking at in terms of scheduling, and

22 that within a week everybody send in their

23 availabilities so that the information that I

24 need to identify the quickest date possible is

25 provided to me as soon as possible.

26 Now, I say "subject to what the pre-trial

27 conference judge may direct" because obviously I

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1 do not know how the discussions will go. But I

2 would urge counsel to try to get to some sort of

3 a final decision on the mode of trial, on whether

4 it will be a trial, and then to send in all the

5 information so I can schedule this because of the

6 reasons you put forward, Mr. Boyd, about the

7 importance of getting this done sooner rather

8 than later. But I am not directing anything yet

9 because I do not know what will happen next week.

10 Have I overlooked anything, Mr. Boyd? Are

11 there any clarifications needed?

12 MR. BOYD: No, ma'am.

13 THE COURT: Did you want to try to move up

14 the pre-trial conference or are you content to

15 leaving things as it is?

16 MR. BOYD: Monday is fine.

17 THE COURT: All right. Anything further

18 from the Crown?

19 MS. PICHÉ: No. Thank you, Your Honour.

20 THE COURT: All right. That is the

21 matters for the afternoon. Thank you.

22 MS. PICHÉ: Thank you, Your Honour.

23 .................................

24 Certified Pursuant to Rule 723

of the Rules of Court

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Jane Romanowich, CSR(A)

27 Court Reporter

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