IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

IN THE MATTER OF:

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

- v -

BENJAMIN PEA'A

Transcript of the s. 525 Bail Review Decision delivered by The Honourable Justice L.A. Charbonneau, sitting in Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories, on August 27, 2018.

APPEARANCES:

Mr. A. Godfrey: Counsel for the Crown

Mr. P. Harte: Counsel for the Accused

(Charges under s. 271, 151, 145(3), 145(5), 145(2)(a) of the Criminal Code)

1 THE COURT: Benjamin Pea'a faces a number
2 of summary conviction charges. He had a
3 show-cause hearing on July 27th, 2018, and was
4 ordered detained by the justice of the peace. He
5 now applies for a review of his detention.

The charges that he faces stem from a series of alleged events spanning over the course of a lengthy period of time, and I am going to refer to those in chronological order. On Territorial Court File 2017-655, he is charged with sexual assault, sexual interference, and breach of a no-contact order with the alleged victim. three offences are alleged to have been committed between July 1st, 2016, and August 31st, 2016. He has pleaded not quilty to those charges, and the trial is scheduled to proceed November 14th, 2018. The allegations on that matter are that the complainant and other youths were staying at a hotel in Yellowknife. They were on their way to Deline. The accused was participating in the trip as well. The complainant alleges that, at one point, they found themselves alone in a room, and he attempted to kiss her and grab her from She was able to get away and reported behind. this to police. The accused was charged and was on process. The process included a no-contact order. She alleges that he breached the

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1 no-contact order twice.

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There was, at one point, another file,

Territorial Court File 2017-2264. The

allegations were of failing to attend court on

May 31st, 2017. That charge has since been

withdrawn.

There is, on Territorial Court File 2018-939, a charge for failing to appear on February 27th, 2018. That date had been scheduled as a date to confirm a trial date tentatively scheduled in March 2018 on the three-count Information involving the sexual assaults and the breaches of undertaking. The accused failed to appear on the February 27th date, so the trial date was cancelled. On this charge, Mr. Pea'a has pleaded guilty, and his sentencing has been adjourned to November 14th with the view of dealing with all his matters at once.

On Territorial Court File 2018-1368, there is a two-count Information. The first is an assault alleged to have happened on July 14th, 2018, and the second is for failing to comply with a reporting condition on the same date. The allegations in support of those charges are that the complainant, who is an adult woman, reported that he assaulted her at her house by choking

her. She alleges that this occurred in the presence of her children. Officers who responded to the complaint noted bruising on her neck. As they were dealing with this investigation, police noted that Mr. Pea'a was on reporting conditions and that he had failed to comply with this requirement, and that led to the fail-to-report charge. My understanding from what I have heard is that it is intended that this trial would hopefully proceed in November as well if not-guilty pleas are entered. These matters are in Territorial Court tomorrow for plea.

The plan put forward at the bail hearing in front of the justice of the peace was that the accused would live with his sister in Wekweeti. There is no RCMP detachment in that community. The JP was told that it takes 2 to 3 hours for RCMP to get there if they are called. The community is serviced out of the Behchoko detachment. They do regular patrols there, but there is not the same police presence in the community as in communities where there is an actually detachment, obviously.

The proposed surety testified at the hearing before the justice of the peace. She was not called at the hearing before me, and the Crown did not ask to cross-examine her. Counsel were

content with my relying on the evidence she gave at the hearing in July, which counsel advised continues to be current. She is the accused's sister and is 28 years old. She confirmed that she was willing to supervise him and that he could live with her. She lives with her two children, aged 6 and 2, in a house that belongs to her grandmother. There is room for him to stay until his matters are dealt with. She works for the Wekweeti Development Corporation and manages the store, the hotel, and the corporation. She testified that he could work where she works and that she would be able to supervise him during the day. The only time where she would not be with him at the workplace would be over the lunch hour, when she goes home to prepare lunch for her children. She testified that she does not go out, does not drink alcohol when she is in the community, and there is no alcohol in her home. She testified that if the accused did not follow his conditions, she would call the police. She testified she understands her obligations as a surety and is prepared to carry those out for as long as is needed. It seems, at the time of the hearing before the justice of the peace, that it was

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contemplated that the trial into at least some of

these matters would be held in August. The proposed surety said she was prepared to supervise the accused until then. Now the matters are scheduled to proceed in November, but there is nothing before me that suggests that she is not prepared to supervise him until then. She also said she was prepared to ensure that the accused has a plane ticket to return to Behchoko for court.

One of the things that came up during her evidence was the whereabouts of the complainants. She confirmed that, to her knowledge, the adult complainant lives in Behchoko. As for the complainant on the sexual assault matter,

Ms. Pea'a testified that she was only rarely in Wekweeti. She believed that she worked for the Tlicho government and was there for the summer for that reason. This, as I will get into further, turned out to be inaccurate.

At the bail review before me, the Defence put forward the same release plan as the one that was presented at the original hearing. It is now undisputed that the surety was mistaken when she was talking about the whereabouts of the complainant on the sexual assault allegations. She was talking about someone else, and this mistake in identity is one of the bases for the

accused's request for a review and why he says his detention is not necessary. The Defence also argues that the justice of the peace does not appear to have taken into account that Mr. Pea'a is an indigenous offender when considering the effects of his criminal record on his release application and his release application more Defence argues that generally. The although there are a number of breaches of court orders on record, the some were alcohol-related: example, the two most recent convictions for breach of probation (failures to keep the peace from 2015) were alcohol-related. Defence also noted that the failure-to-appear conviction is somewhat dated. It goes back to 2011. Defence argues that, in light of the strong level of supervision contemplated by the plan, criminal record should not be of great concern to the Court on this application.

Although the Defence did not argue this as a discrete ground for a review, counsel noted that the justice of the peace's reasons were very brief and not particularly clear. Among other things, he did not address the release plan in any meaningful way. He did not deal with the submission about how the accused's circumstances should impact on the relevance of his criminal

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record. He made reference to having concerns for the safety of both complainants, whereas, on the facts before him, only one was believed to live in Wekweeti.

The Crown does not dispute that the person the surety testified about at the original hearing was not the complainant on the sexual assault allegations. Since then, the Crown has tried to clarify the whereabouts of this complainant but at the time of the hearing only had partial information on this point because she has been difficult to reach.

What counsel was able to tell me was that the complainant had been in Ottawa for some time; that the last time the Crown's office was in contact with her, she had indicated she would return to the Northwest Territories in the middle of this month. She was unsure where she would be residing. There was a possibility that she would return to Wekweeti, but she did not have any firm plans at that point.

The Crown maintains its objection to release on the primary and secondary grounds. The Crown points to how dated the first set of charges are and to the fact that the accused's failure to appear at the February date to confirm the March trial date resulted in significant delay already.

The Crown is concerned about further delay that could arise if the accused fails to appear again.

With respect to the secondary grounds, the Crown's concerns stem largely from the fact that there is no police detachment in Wekweeti, which has an impact on the degree of meaningful supervision the authorities can exercise outside the supervision that the surety can offer. An added concern is the response time should there be any issue. The Crown also notes that, aside from the criminal record, the current set of allegations raise concern about the accused's ability or willingness to comply with release terms.

Before I turn to the analysis of the issues raised by this bail review, I do want to make a few comments about the importance for justices of the peace to provide reasons when they render a decision about bail.

The justice of the peace delivered his decision immediately after counsel finished their submissions. The decision reads as follows:

Looking at the plan put forward by defence, I agree with the crown. I have some serious concerns about the telephone line contact. I have concerns about the primary, the

safety of the victim in both, and the fact that the person is not far away, and that, even though the accused is working or will be working, it still leaves me grave doubts as to how much he will be covered or be supervised. So I'm not -- on primary and secondary grounds, I'm not granting release.

The right not to be denied bail without just cause is fundamentally important and constitutionally protected. As I said in delivering another bail review decision earlier today, the Supreme Court of Canada described this right in R v Antic, 2017 SCC 27, as "an essential element of an enlightened criminal justice system" and said it "entrenches the effect of the presumption of innocence at the pretrial stage of the criminal trial process and safeguards the liberty of accused persons."

Any decision that has the consequences that a decision on bail has needs to be explained by the decisionmaker. The importance of providing reasons in other contexts was emphasized by the Supreme Court of Canada in R v Sheppard. In that case, the Supreme Court said that reasons serve a number of important purposes, including

accountability for decisionmaking and reviewability of decisions. These principles are also relevant in the context of decisions about bail.

A person who is ordered detained at the pretrial stage is entitled to understand why the decisionmaker has come to the conclusion that this was necessary, and, if an accused is released over the Crown's objections, complainants, witnesses, and members of the public are entitled to know why that decision was made, particularly when the allegations are serious and raise public safety concerns.

Reasons are essential for there to be accountability and transparency in the decisionmaking process. Of course, when there is a jury election, bail decisions are covered by publication bans for periods of time, so the public at large may not have immediate access to them through media reports, but they are still part of the record, and those publication bans cease to be in effect when the trial has been completed, which means the transparency is still there.

Equally importantly, there is the issue of reviewability of the decision. In the context of bail reviews, the Supreme Court has made it clear

in R v St-Cloud that in this Court, after a justice of the peace's decision on bail, the door will not always be open to review. Among the things that open the door to review by this Court, aside from the statutory reviews pursuant to Section 525, review will be open if the justice of the peace has erred in law, if the decision by the justice was clearly inappropriate because the justice who rendered it gave excessive weight to one relevant factor or insufficient weight to another.

This particular case has come before the Court by operation of Section 525 of the Code, so the issue does not arise in the same way, but the point is that any time a justice of the peace delivers a bail decision, that decision could be subject of a review application at the instance of the Crown or of the accused; therefore, reasons must be given that will enable the reviewing Court to carry out its function.

The Crown noted at the hearing into this application that the justice of the peace did provide some reasons but fairly acknowledged that they were very brief; and that, they were. It would have been very helpful if the justice of the peace had elaborated more on the nature of his concerns for the safety of both complainants,

including the one who lived in Behchoko,
especially considering that the focus of the
Crown's submissions at the bail hearing was
concerns for the safety of only one of the
complainants, the one who was, at the time,
believed to live in Wekweeti. It would also have
been helpful for the justice of the peace to
explain why the proposed plan did not address his
concerns and for him to have addressed the
defence's submissions about the lack of
significance of the accused's criminal record in
light of the circumstances.

If what was at issue at the review before me was how the justice of the peace weighed the various factors or whether his decision was clearly inappropriate within the meaning of <code>St-Cloud</code>, I have to say it would be extremely difficult for this Court to engage in the analysis it is required to undertake.

I make these comments not to be critical but simply to convey the importance for justices of the peace to endeavor to explain how they have arrived at any given decision at the conclusion of the bail hearing. To do so may require taking a short adjournment before delivering the decision, but given the importance of bail decisions, given what is at stake, in my

respectful view, it is time well spent to ensure that the main issues raised by each of the parties have been properly addressed.

Turning to the question I must decide on this application, it is clear that at least part of the information that caused concern to the justice of the peace was his belief that one of the complainants was present in the community where it was proposed the accused would be released, and that was inaccurate because the surety confused that complainant with another person. This alone is a reason to revisit the issue of bail, quite apart from any deficiencies that may exist with the reasons provided by the justice of the peace for ordering detention.

Other things that have changed about the circumstances are that one of the breach charges that the accused faced has been withdrawn. That is somewhat balanced out by the fact that, on the failure-to-appear charge, he has now pleaded guilty, and so, he has acknowledged that he did not appear on the date that had been scheduled to confirm the March trial date.

The primary ground is concerned with whether the accused's detention is necessary to ensure that he will attend court. In the circumstances of this case, the concern is not really about the

accused fleeing the jurisdiction, disappearing forever, or anything of that nature. His ties are with the NWT. The concern is more that, if he fails to attend his November trial date, there will be yet another delay on a matter that has been adjourned multiple times and is already 2 years old. In this jurisdiction, such a delay is unheard of for dealing with summary conviction matters and well above what the Supreme Court has said is reasonable in the context of matters going to trial in the Territorial Court.

The accused already has a conviction for failing to attend court. He has now pleaded guilty to having failed to appear when these matters were to be spoken to to confirm a trial date. This raises very real concerns about whether he can be trusted to attend court at the currently scheduled date. The surety can make arrangements for him, but, ultimately, he is the one who has to get on the plane and attend court to face these charges and the possible consequences of being found guilty, if this is what ends up happening.

The secondary ground is concerned with public safety and interference with the administration of justice. Here, the accused was released after being charged with offences of a

sexual nature against a young person. He is charged with having breached twice a no-contact condition with respect to that witness. He has failed to appear on that matter, as already noted, and he now faces a charge for a further crime of violence as well as with not complying with a reporting condition.

I agree with defence counsel that a criminal record must be examined in the context of the circumstances of the offender and that, for example, breaches of court orders can sometimes show little more than the fact that a person has a substance abuse issue and has been released on terms that he or she simply could not be expected to follow.

In this case, the evidence presented by the accused is that he has effectively been homeless and couch-surfing for a long period of time, and he has only had sporadic employment. His criminal record cannot be read in isolation from those circumstances. At the same time, this is an accused who has, on this string of charges, been granted bail, not just once but multiple times. He was trusted to comply with conditions despite his record for noncompliance. The fact that his personal circumstances provide an explanation and context for his conduct does not,

in and of itself, remove the concerns that this conduct gives rise to.

Weighing against these concerns, the accused presents a release plan that has some strengths in that he would work, this work being provided by his surety and, therefore, be under her supervision most of the waking hours. Given that there is no police presence in that particular community, there will be very little by way of external supervision aside from that of the surety, so, in reality, the strength of this plan stands or falls with the strength of the surety.

Given the accused's track record for compliance, without someone willing to supervise him and being willing to risk losing money if the duties are not carried out adequately, it would not be realistic to contemplate release. Reporting through a landline is really the only means of reporting available under the circumstances. It is far from perfect, but it is something. There will be limited possibilities for random curfew checks and no possibility for immediate intervention if problems arise. At the same time, it is not even known at this time if the complainant will return to Wekweeti. addition, the right to reasonable bail is constitutionally protected for everyone in this

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country, no matter which community they live in and where their ties are located.

I do have concerns under both grounds but especially under the primary ground. At the same time, bearing in mind that these are all summary conviction offences and that the accused's criminal record is relatively limited, I am not satisfied that pretrial detention is the only way to alleviate those concerns.

I am going to grant the application, and I am going to release the accused, but on very strict conditions, which will place considerable burden on his surety. If she is unable to follow through on the things she told the justice of the peace she could do, she will need to contact police, and the accused will have to be taken back into custody. I trust that defence counsel will make sure that she realizes this and takes it seriously. If there are any breaches of these conditions, she will have to answer for the steps that she has taken to supervise him, and if she does not satisfy the Court that she has done everything that she could to ensure compliance, she will face forfeiture.

Because of the delay and of primary-ground concerns, I am not prepared to have the accused released until his travel plans for the November

court dates are actually made and proof has been provided to the RCMP and to the court registry. In addition, in order to ensure that the matters do proceed as scheduled, I will require him to surrender himself into the custody of the RCMP some days ahead of his actual court date. That way, if he does not turn himself in, police will have time to apprehend him and ensure that he is there to face these charges.

For those reasons, I am granting the application and ordering that Mr. Pea'a can be released on a recognizance. This will be with Bianca Pea'a as his surety. She will be responsible for \$1,000 without deposit on that recognizance if there is any breaches, and Mr. Pea'a will also be responsible for a separate \$1,000 without deposit if he breaches. The conditions of release will be as follows. Listen carefully, Mr. Pea'a. These are the conditions you will be bound by between now and your trial date. The first is to keep the peace and be of good behaviour. You know what that means. second is to attend court as required. You also know what that means. Now, I have a question because, in the transcript, there was reference to House 24A in Wekweeti being the house of -where Bianca Pea'a lives, but on the form of

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1		recognizance of surety, it said 42A, so I do not
2		know which is right, but someone will have to
3		find out and let the clerk know.
4		It will take a while before these can be
5		perfected, so I will just ask, Mr. Harte, that
6		you clarify this with the surety and just let the
7		Court know. So it is either 24A or 42A.
8		Whichever it is, but the grandmother's house.
9	THE	ACCUSED: If it was 42, it would have
10		been uptown and then 24 is downtown, so I think
11		it's 24. It kind of got mistaken from them
12		because she used to live in Whati, and that was
13		at 42, the House A unit, so I think she got that
14		mistaken and it's supposed to be 24 house
15		house unit.
16	MR.	HARTE: I'll make sure that the

17 correct number is --

18 THE COURT: All right. See if we have the correct house, and if there is any confusion, we 19 20 are talking about Bianca Pea'a's house, whatever 21 the number is.

> The other condition is that you are to remain in Wekweeti except for the purpose of attending court. You are to abstain absolutely from the possession and consumption of alcohol. You are to provide a sample of your breath upon demand to a police officer who has reasonable

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grounds to believe you have been consuming
alcohol. So if they ask you for a breath sample,
you have to give it to them.

You are going to abide by a curfew and be inside that residence between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. except if you are required to be at work. 10 o'clock at night, 7 o'clock in the morning, you have to be inside the house. You are to follow any house rules imposed by Bianca Pea'a. This is so that she has -- she is the only person who can actually supervise you because there is no police officers there, so I want to give her the control that she might need in order to be able to discharge her obligations.

The next condition is going to be that you maintain employment under her supervision. So if she says you will go work as a cook, that is what you will do. If she says you do some other work under the umbrella of the places she has some control over, then you just follow her directions in that regard. No contact, direct or indirect, with Star Beaulieu or Lilah Judah. That is straightforward enough.

You are to provide proof of purchase of your travel arrangements to the court registry and to the RCMP. The requirements for this travel are going to be that you travel the most direct route

- 1 available, and those travel dates must be such 2 that you are able to turn yourself into the 3 custody of the RCMP before 4:00 p.m. on Friday, November the 9th.
- 5 The next condition is whatever date you travel, immediately upon arriving, you will go 6 7 directly to the RCMP detachment to turn yourself 8 in to their custody.
- 9 The next condition is you will report by 10 landline to the RCMP detachment in Behchoko 11 within 48 hours of your return to Wekweeti. 12 within 2 days after you arrive in Wekweeti, you 13 report to them by phone, using that landline, and 14 after, you report on Mondays, Thursdays, and 15 Saturdays between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. All of these will be written down for you. 16
- 17 MR. GODFREY: And just -- if I could, Your 18 Honour, Saturday, the -- there is no clerk at the 19 Behchoko RCMP, and I don't believe there would be 20 anybody answering the phone on the Saturdays.
- 21 THE COURT: Same with Sundays, I take it?
- 2.2 MR. GODFREY: Yes.
- THE COURT: 23 Okay. So do you think Monday
- 24 and Thursday would be sufficient?
- 25 MR. GODFREY: Yes, that would be fine.
- All right. So Monday and 26 THE COURT:
- 27 Thursday, not Saturday.

The next condition is you will present yourself at the door of the residence or answer the landline if a member of the RCMP or a bail supervisor conducts a curfew check. This is just to make sure you are following that condition.

You are not to be in possession of a firearm, crossbow, prohibited weapon, restricted weapon, prohibited device, ammunition, prohibited ammunition, or explosive substance. Most of those things probably do not apply to you, but, basically, you cannot be in position of those types of weapons.

Now, I will just indicate that it is my intention that conditions that I have numbered as 11 and 12, so the ones that relate to the travel arrangements and the surrendering into custody, be replaced by similar conditions achieving the same purpose if, for whatever reason, there is a change in the trial date. So that could be done by way of written application, if it can be worked out between counsel, or through another court appearance, but my main concern, as will be obvious from everything I have said, is that the matters do proceed to trial when they are scheduled and that there is no further delay due to a failure to attend.

So it may take some time before all of this

Τ	is worked out. Until then, of course, Mr. Pea'a
2	will have to remain in custody, but once these
3	requirements have been satisfied and the surety
4	has signed the recognizance, he will be released
5	on those conditions.
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7	CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIPT
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9	I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the
10	foregoing pages are a complete and accurate
11	transcript of the proceedings taken down by me in
12	shorthand and transcribed from my shorthand notes
13	to the best of my skill and ability.
14	Dated at the City of Edmonton, Province of
15	Alberta, this 7th day of September, 2018.
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17	Certified Pursuant to Rule 723
18	of the Rules of Court
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20	Joanne Lawrence
21	Joanne advience
22	Joanne Lawrence
23	Court Reporter
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