

No.

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

ABRAHAM FAGOT MEJIA, PETITIONER

v.

STATE OF FLORIDA, RESPONDENT.

*ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO
THE FOURTH DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL OF FLORIDA*

APPENDIX TO PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

CAREY HAUGHWOUT

Public Defender

Paul Edward Petillo

Assistant Public Defender

Counsel of Record

Office of the Public Defender

Fifteenth Judicial Circuit of Florida

421 Third Street

West Palm Beach, Florida 33401

(561) 355-7600

ppetillo@pd15.state.fl.us

appeals@pd15.org

DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA
FOURTH DISTRICT

ABRAHAM FAGOT MEJIA,
Appellant,

v.

STATE OF FLORIDA,
Appellee.

No. 4D2023-0181

[October 25, 2023]

Appeal from the Circuit Court for the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, Palm Beach County; Scott Suskauer, Judge; L.T. Case No. 50-2019-CF-005813-XXXX.

Carey Haughwout, Public Defender, and Alan T. Lipson, Assistant Public Defender, West Palm Beach, for appellant.

Ashley Moody, Attorney General, Tallahassee, and Kimberly T. Acuña, Senior Assistant Attorney General, West Palm Beach, for appellee.

PER CURIAM.

Affirmed. See Guzman v. State, 350 So. 3d 72 (Fla. 4th DCA 2022).

GERBER, LEVINE and CONNER, JJ., concur.

* * *

Not final until disposition of timely filed motion for rehearing.

**IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA,
FOURTH DISTRICT**

ABRAHAM FAGOT MEJIA,

CASE NO. 4D23-0181

Defendant-Appellant,

vs.

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Plaintiff-Appellee.

_____/

**MOTION FOR WRITTEN OPINION AND CERTIFICATION OF
QUESTION OF GREAT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
ON UNADDRESSED POINT**

Pursuant to Fla. R. App. P. 9.330, Defendant-Appellant, ABRAHAM FAGOT MEJIA, by and through undersigned counsel, files this Motion for the Issuance of a Written Opinion and Certification of Great Public Importance On Unaddressed Point challenging a six-person jury for defendant charged with a felony, from the *per curiam* decision rendered on October 25, 2023.

1. Rehearing in the form of a written opinion is necessary in order to enable the Supreme Court of Florida to revisit the constitutional authority requiring a twelve-person juries for all felonies. The constitutional parameters of jury composition in criminal cases is a question of great public importance that is being considered by the Supreme Court of the United States in two

pending cases.

2. Whether the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution guarantee the right to a trial by a twelve person jury when charged with a felony is a fundamental question that is ripe for review by the Supreme Court of Florida. The precedent supporting a reduced sized jury of six in Williams v. Florida, 399 U.S. 78 (1970), has been effectively invalidated by Ramos v. Louisiana, 140 S.Ct. 1390 (2020), recognizing that the Sixth Amendment’s “trial by an impartial jury” requirement encompasses what the term “meant at the Sixth Amendment’s adoption.” Ramos, Id. at 1395. What the term meant then, as now, is a twelve-person jury. Blackstone recognized that under the common law, “no person could be found guilty of a serious crime unless the truth of every accusation . . . should . . . be confirmed by the unanimous suffrage of twelve of his equals and neighbors[.]” Id. [quoting 4 W. Blackstone, Commentaries on the laws of England 343 (1769)]. **“A verdict, taken from eleven, was no verdict at all.”** Id. [Internal citation and quotations removed.]

THIS COURT SHOULD ISSUE A WRITTEN OPINION ON THE TWELVE PERSON JURY

3. A written opinion will provide a legitimate basis for the Supreme Court of Florida to review an express construction of a United States Constitution provision as authorized by Fla. R. App. P. 9.030(a)(2)(A)(ii). As argued in appellate briefs, Florida precedent allowing a six-person jury in non-murder capital cases, State v. Hogan, 451 So. 2d 844, 845 (Fla. 1984), is incompatible with the prevailing Supreme Court of the United States precedent and is inconsistent with the purpose and meaning of the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, thus providing timely and justified opportunity for Supreme Court of Florida review. See, Guzman v. State, 350 So. 3d 72 (Fla. 4th DCA 2022) (Gross, J. Concurring), rev. denied, 2923 WL 3830251 (Fla. 2023); Hall v. State, 853 So. 2d 546, 547 (Fla. 1st DCA 2023) (appellate court certified whether defendant entitled to twelve-person jury as a question of great public importance), rev. denied, 865 So. 2d 480 (Fla. 2003).

4. The Supreme Court of the United States is currently considering whether to grant certiorari on this very question in seven petitions originating

from Florida courts.¹ The certiorari petitions ask the same question that is at issue in this case: Whether the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments guarantee the right to a trial by a twelve-person jury when defendant is charged with a felony.

5. The United States Supreme Court directed the State of Florida to respond to all of these petitions, a signal that the Court considers the question to be significant. The State of Florida has responded to two of those petitions and has argued that the Court lacks jurisdiction because Petitioners did not move to certify a question and thereby seek review in the Supreme Court of Florida.

6. A written opinion on this important question allows the Supreme Court of Florida to evaluate precedent and practical issues arising from a six-person jury system. The time to grapple with the Williams legacy is now.

¹. See, Guzman v. Florida, 23-5173; Cunningham v. Florida, 23-5171; Arellano-Ramirez v. Florida, 23-5567; Sposato v. Florida, 23-5575; Morton v. Florida, 23-5579; Jackson v. Florida, 23-5570; Crane v. Florida, 23-5455.

**IN THE ALTERNATIVE THIS HONORABLE COURT SHOULD CERTIFY
TO THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA A QUESTION OF GREAT
PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

7. The following question of great public importance should be certified to the Supreme Court of Florida:

Do the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments guarantee the right to a trial by a twelve-person jury when defendant is charged with a felony?

8. This appeal involves an issue of great public importance to the fundamental principles of constitutional construction and definition of what is meant by a trial by jury. The Supreme Court of Florida should be given the opportunity to revisit Williams in light of the recognition by the Supreme Court of the United States that the Williams Court relied upon misinformation and a strained analysis when approving six-person juries in felony cases.

WHEREFORE, Defendant-Appellant, ABRAHAM FAGOT MEJIA, respectfully requests that this Honorable Court either issue a written opinion in this cause or certify a question of great public importance.

Respectfully submitted,

CAREY HAUGHWOUT

Public Defender
15th Judicial Circuit of Florida
Criminal Justice Building
421 3rd Street/6th Floor
West Palm Beach, Florida 33401
(561) 355-7600, ALipson@pd15.org
appeals@pd15.state.fl.us

/s/ Alan T. Lipson _____
ALAN T. LIPSON
Assistant Public Defender
Florida Bar No. 0151810

Attorney for Abraham Fagot Mejia

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a true and correct copy of the foregoing Motion for Written Opinion and Certification of Question of Great Public Importance on Unaddressed Point has been furnished by E-mail to Assistant Attorney General, Kimberly T. Acuna [CrimAppWPB@myfloridalegal.com] and E-filed with this Honorable Court, this 2nd day of November, 2023.

/s/ Alan T. Lipson _____
ALAN T. LIPSON

**IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA
FOURTH DISTRICT, 110 SOUTH TAMARIND AVENUE, WEST PALM BEACH, FL 33401**

December 5, 2023

ABRAHAM FAGOT MEJIA ,
Appellant(s)

v.

STATE OF FLORIDA,
Appellee(s).

CASE NO. - 4D2023-0181

L.T. No. - 502019CF005813AXXX

BY ORDER OF THE COURT:

ORDERED that Appellant's November 02, 2023 motion for written opinion and certification is denied.

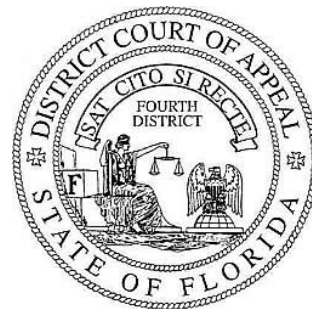
Served:

Kimberly Tollett Acuna
Attorney General-W.P.B.
Allen R Geesey
Alan Terry Lipson
Palm Beach Public Defender

KR

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing is a true copy of the court's order.


LONN WEISSBLUM, Clerk
Fourth District Court of Appeal
4D2023-0181 December 5, 2023



SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Point I

The US Supreme Court held in Ramos v. Louisiana, 140 S.Ct. 1390 (2020) that the 6th Amendment requires a trial by an impartial jury consisting of 12 persons. Defendant's conviction by a six person jury violated the 6th and 14th Amendments to the US Constitution.

ARGUMENT

POINT I

DEFENDANT WAS ENTITLED TO A TWELVE PERSON JURY UNDER THE SIXTH AND FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT AND DID NOT WAIVE THAT RIGHT.

Standard of Review

The standard of review of constitutional claims is de novo. See, A.B. v. Florida Dept. of Children & Family Services, 901 So. 2d 324, 326 (Fla. 3d DCA 2005).

Argument

Defendant was convicted by a jury composed of six persons. (T 226-228) He argues that the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments guarantee the right to a twelve (12) person jury when the defendant is charged with an offense punishable by more than 6 months in jail.

Defendant can raise this issue for the first time on appeal because the issue isn't whether he preserved this issue by objecting in the trial court; rather, the issue is whether he personally waived his constitutional right to a twelve-person jury. He did not. For example, even if defense counsel had no objection to a five-person jury, but the trial court did not secure the defendant's personal waiver of his or her right to a six-person jury, the case

would present reversible error on appeal. Wallace v. State, 722 So. 2d 913, 914 (Fla. 2d DCA 1998); Gamble v. State, 696 So. 2d 420, 420 (Fla. 5th DCA 1997); Blair v. State, 698 So. 2d 1210, 1217-18 (Fla. 1997); see also, Johnson v. State, 994 So. 2d 960, 963-64 (Fla. 2008) (holding that defendant must personally waive constitutional right to have jury decide prior-convictions element in felony DUI case; defense counsel's stipulation that trial court act as fact finder is insufficient).

In short, a defendant personally must agree to be tried by a jury with fewer jurors than constitutionally required. Defendant acknowledges this Honorable Court came to a different conclusion in Albritton v. State, 48 Fla. L. Weekly D922 (Fla. 4th DCA opinion filed May 3, 2023). However, this Honorable Court may have overlooked the holdings in the Wallace, Gamble, Blair, and Johnson cases.

The U.S. Supreme Court held in Williams v. Florida, 399 U.S. 78, 86 (1970), that juries as small as six were constitutionally permissible. But Williams is impossible to square with the Court's ruling in Ramos v. Louisiana, 140 S. Ct. 1390 (2020), which concluded that the Sixth Amendment's "trial by an impartial jury" requirement encompasses what the term "meant at the Sixth Amendment's adoption," *id.* at 1395. "Defendant enjoys a constitutional right

to demand that his liberty should not be taken from him except by the joint action of the court and the unanimous verdict of a jury of twelve persons.” Id. at 1396-9. Defendant’s conviction by a six-person jury violated the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

Defendant acknowledges that this Court rejected this argument in Guzman v. State, 350 So. 3d 72 (Fla. 4th DCA 2022). This will provide defendant an avenue for supreme court review under Jollie v. State, 405 So. 2d 418 (Fla. 1981), and will avoid the randomness of the review process. See id. at 421 (recognizing that “no litigant can guide the district court’s selection of the lead case” and the citation PCA can avoid the randomness of the review process).

In rejecting Guzman’s argument, this Court cited State v. Khorrami, 1 CA-CR 20-0088, 2021 WL 3197499 (Ariz. Ct. App. July 29, 2021). Guzman, 350 So. 3d at 73. At the time of this Court’s decision, Khorrami’s petition for writ of certiorari in the United States Supreme Court was pending. The petition was subsequently denied, over dissents by Justices Kavanaugh and Gorsuch. Khorrami v. Arizona, 21-1553, 2022 WL 16726030 (U.S. Nov. 7, 2022).

Although there is no legal significance to the denial of a petition for writ

of certiorari,¹ there are differences between Florida's and Arizona's systems that may account for the denial of the writ.

In Arizona, criminal defendants are guaranteed “a twelve-person jury in cases when the sentence authorized by law is death or imprisonment for thirty years or more.... Otherwise, a criminal defendant may be tried with an eight-person jury.” State v. Khorrami, 2021 WL 3197499, at *8 (citations omitted). Florida juries are smaller (six versus eight), and those smaller juries are mandated in every case except capital cases.

And the origin of Florida's rule is disturbing. In his dissent, Justice Gorsuch observed: “During the Jim Crow era, some States restricted the size of juries and abandoned the demand for a unanimous verdict as part of a deliberate and systematic effort to suppress minority voices in public affairs.” Khorrami v. Arizona, 2022 WL 16726030, at *5 (Gorsuch, J., dissenting) (citations omitted). He noted, however, that Arizona's law was likely motivated by costs not race. *Id.* But Florida's jury of six did arise in that Jim Crow era context of a “deliberate and systematic effort to suppress minority voices in

¹ See *Ramos v. Louisiana*, 140 S.Ct. 1390 (2020) at n.56 (“The significance of a denial of a petition for certiorari ought no longer require discussion. This Court has said again and again and again that such a denial has no legal significance whatever bearing on the merits of the claim.”) (cleaned up).

public affairs.” *Id.* The historical background is as follows:

In 1875, the Jury Clause of the 1868 constitution was amended to provide that the number of jurors “for the trial of causes in any court may be fixed by law.” See, Florida Fertilizer & Mfg. Co. v. Boswell, 34 So. 241, 241 (Fla. 1903).

The common law rule of a jury of twelve was still kept in Florida while federal troops remained in the state. There was no provision for a jury of less than twelve until the Legislature enacted a provision specifying a jury of six in Chapter 3010, section 6. See Gibson v. State, 16 Fla. 291, 297–98 (1877); Florida Fertilizer, 34 So. at 241.

The Legislature enacted chapter 3010 with the jury-of-six provision on February 17, 1877. Gibson, 16 Fla. 294. This was less than a month after the last federal troops were withdrawn from Florida in January 1877. *See* Jerrell H. Shofner, Reconstruction and Renewal, 1865-1877, in The History of Florida 273 (Michael Gannon, ed., first paperback edition 2018) (“there were [no federal troops] in Florida after 23 January 1877”).

The jury-of-six thus first saw light at the birth of the Jim Crow era as former Confederates regained power in southern states and state prosecutors made a concerted effort to prevent blacks from serving on jurors.

On its face the 1868 constitution extended the franchise to black men. But the historical context shows that it was part of the overall resistance to Reconstruction efforts to protect the rights of black citizens. The constitution was the product of a remarkable series of events including a coup in which leaders of the white southern (or native) faction took possession of the assembly hall in the middle of the night, excluding Radical Republican delegates from the proceedings. See Richard L. Hume, Membership of the Florida Constitutional Convention of 1868: A Case Study of Republican Factionalism in the Reconstruction South, 51 Fla. Hist. Q. 1, 5-6 (1972); Shofner at 266. A reconciliation was effected as the “outside” whites “united with the majority of the body’s native whites to frame a constitution designed to continue white dominance.” Hume at 15.

The purpose of the resulting constitution was spelled out by Harrison Reed, a leader of the prevailing faction and the first governor elected under the 1868 constitution, who wrote to Senator Yulee that the new constitution was constructed to bar blacks from legislative office: “Under our Constitution the Judiciary & State officers will be appointed & the apportionment will prevent a negro legislature.” Hume, 15-16. See also Shofner 266.

Smaller juries and non-unanimous verdicts were part of a Jim Crow era

effort “to suppress minority voices in public affairs.” Khorrami v. Arizona, 2022 WL 16726030, at *5 (Gorsuch, J., dissenting); see also Ramos, 140 S. Ct. at 1417 (Kavanaugh, J., concurring) (non-unanimity was enacted “as one pillar of a comprehensive and brutal program of racist Jim Crow measures against African-Americans, especially in voting and jury service.”). The history of Florida’s jury of six arises from the same historical context.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT, FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

CASE NO: 2019CF005813AMB

DIV: X

OBTS NUMBER:

STATE OF FLORIDA

v.

ABRAHAM FAGOT MEJIA,

W/M,

09/02/1991, [REDACTED]

- ☐ PROBATION VIOLATOR
☐ COMMUNITY CONTROL VIOLATOR
☐ RETRIAL
☐ RESENTENCE

JUDGMENT

The above defendant, being personally before this Court represented by P.D. (attorney)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Having been tried and found guilty of the following crime(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Having entered a plea of guilty to the following crime(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Having entered a plea of nolo contendere to the following crime(s):
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

COUNT	CRIME	OFFENSE STATUTE NUMBER(S)	DEGREE
1	Poss. of Schedule I substance w/ intent to Deliver	893.13(1)(a)(1)	3 rd
2	Poss. of Cannabis w/ intent to Deliver	893.13(1)(a)	3 rd

☒ and no cause having been shown why the Defendant should not be adjudicated guilty, IT IS ORDERED THAT the defendant is hereby ADJUDICATED GUILTY of the above crime(s).

☐ and being a qualified offender pursuant to s. 943.325, the Defendant shall be required to submit DNA samples as required by law.

☐ and good cause being shown: IT IS ORDERED THAT ADJUDICATION OF GUILT BE WITHHELD.

SENTENCE

STAYED

- ☐ The Court hereby stays and withholds imposition of sentence as to count(s) and places the Defendant on
☐ probation and/or ☐ Community Control under the supervision of the Dept. Of Corrections
(conditions of probation set forth in separate order).

SENTENCE

DEFERRED

- ☐ The Court hereby defers imposition of sentence until

The Defendant in Open Court was advised of his right to appeal from the Judgment by filing notice of appeal with the Clerk of Court within thirty days following the date sentence is imposed or probation is ordered pursuant to this adjudication. The defendant was also advised of his right to the assistance of counsel in taking said appeal at the expense of the State upon showing of indigency.

DONE AND ORDERED in Open Court at Palm Beach County, Florida, this 23 day of Sept., 2019: 2022

CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE

FILED
Circuit Criminal Department

SEP 23 2022

JOSEPH ABRUZZO
Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller
Palm Beach County

000151

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

SENTENCE

(As to Count(s) 1, 2)

Defendant: Abraham Majia

Case Number: 19CF5813AXK

OBTS Number: _____

The Defendant, being personally before this Court, accompanied by the defendant's attorney of record, A. Geesey, PSA, and having been adjudicated guilty herein, and the Court having given the Defendant an opportunity to be heard and to offer matters in mitigation of sentence, and to show cause why Defendant should not be sentenced as provided by law, and no cause being shown,

IT IS THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT that:

The Defendant pay a fine of \$ _____ pursuant to § 755.083, Florida Statutes, plus \$ _____ as the 5% surcharge required by section 938.04, Florida Statutes.

The Defendant is hereby committed to the custody of the
☒ Department of Corrections
☐ Sheriff of Palm Beach County, Florida

☐ Department of Corrections as a youthful offender
For a term of 36 mos It is further ordered that the Defendant shall be allowed a total of 99 days as credit for time incarcerated prior to imposition of this sentence. It is further ordered that the composite term of all sentences imposed for the counts specified in the order shall run

☐ consecutive to ☒ concurrent with (check one) the following:

☒ Any active sentence being served

Specific sentences: cts 1-2

☐ The instant sentence is based upon the Court having previously placed the Defendant on probation and having subsequently revoked the Defendant's probation for violation(s) of condition(s) _____.

In the event the above sentence is to the Department of Corrections, the Sheriff of Palm Beach County, Florida is hereby ordered and directed to deliver the Defendant to the Department of Corrections together with a copy of the Judgment and Sentence, and any other documents specified by Florida Statute. Additionally, pursuant to §947.16(4), Florida Statutes, the Court retains jurisdiction over the Defendant.

☐ The Sentencing Court objects to the Defendant being placed into the Youthful Offender Basic Training Program pursuant to Florida Statute §958.045.

☐ Pursuant to §322.055, 322.056, 322.26, 322.274, Florida Statutes, The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles is directed to revoke the Defendant's privilege to drive. The Clerk of the Court is Ordered to report the conviction and revocation to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

DONE AND ORDERED in Open Court at West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida this 28th day of Dec, 2022

FILED

Circuit Criminal Department

DEC 28 2022

JOSEPH ABRUZZO

Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller
Palm Beach County

CIRCUIT JUDGE

October 2019

Form 14

000169