

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

SHAUN ARMSTRONG, : Case No. 2012-0244
: :
Plaintiff-Appellant, : :
: :
v. : (On Appeal from the
: Clark County Court of Appeals
JOHN R. JURGENSON, et al. : Second Appellate District
: Case No. 2011-CA-6)
: :
Defendants-Appellees :

BRIEF OF APPELLANT, SHAUN ARMSTRONG

Jeffrey W. Harris (0077098)
Harris & Burgin, LPA
9545 Kenwood Rd. Suite 301
Cincinnati, OH 45242
(513) 891-3270
(513) 891-3266
jh@harris-burgin.com
Attorney for Appellant, Shaun Armstrong

Corey Crognale (0017004)
Ice Miller
250 West Street
Columbus, OH 43215
Attorney for Appellee, John R. Jurgenson

Colleen Erdman
Assistant Attorney General
Workers' Compensation Section
150 E. Gay Street, 22nd Floor
Columbus, OH 43215
Attorney for Administrator

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STATEMENT OF FACTS

Appellant Shaun Armstrong was injured during the course of his employment with the John R. Jurgenson Company on August, 27, 2009, when the truck he was driving was rear ended by an oncoming van. (Stipulations of Fact). A workers' compensation claim arising from the incident has been assigned claim number 09-844612 and has been recognized for the conditions of cervical sprain, thoracic sprain, lumbar sprain, left shoulder sprain/contusion; and left posterior labral tear. (*Id.*). Mr. Armstrong was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder related to his work related accident, which he sought to have recognized as a part of his workers' compensation claim.

Parties have stipulated that the post-traumatic stress disorder exists. (*Id.*). Testimony presented from all expert witnesses confirms that Mr. Armstrong suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the incidents related to his August 27, 2009, motor vehicle accident. (Deposition of Dr. Jennifer Stoeckel, p. 18; Deposition of Dr. Lee Howard p. 25).

Despite the presence of a wealth of caselaw demonstrating that psychological conditions arising contemporaneous to physical injuries are compensable under workers' compensation, the trial judge ultimately found that contemporaneous psychological injuries are not compensable and ruled in favor of Defendant-Appellee. (Entry of Judge Rastatter). Upon appeal, the Second District Appellate Court upheld the denial based upon a reinterpretation of R.C. 4123.01(C)(1), which it indicates no longer provides for the recognition of psychological conditions arising contemporaneous to physical injuries.

Appellant asserts that the decision of the Second District directly contradicts a long line of Ohio Supreme Court decisions, the most explicit of which is *McCrone v. Bank One Corp.* (2005), 107 Ohio St.3d 272, which indicate that psychological conditions arising

contemporaneous to physical injuries are compensable under the Ohio workers' compensation system. *McCrone*, 107 Ohio St.3d 272, *Bunger v. Lawson Co.* (1998), 82 Ohio St.3d 463, *Rambaldo v. Accurate Die Casting* (1992), 65 Ohio St.3d 281, *State ex rel. Clark v. Indus. Comm.* (2001), 92 Ohio St.3d 455, 459, *Andolsek v. Kirtland* (11th Dist. 1994), 99 Ohio App.3d 333, 335; *Connors v. Sterling Milk Co.* (3rd Dist. 1993), 98 Ohio App.3d 711; *Grant v. Ohio Department of Liquor Control*, (1st Dist. 1993), 86 Ohio App.3d 76, 83. Appellant further assert that upholding the Second District's decision would cause irreparable harm to thousands of injured workers who suffer psychological trauma contemporaneous to suffering physical injuries, and who have been justifiably able to rely on workers compensation coverage for their work related contemporaneous psychological conditions prior to the decision of the Second District in this case. As such, Appellant prays that this Court issue a decision consistent with its previous ruling by vacating the decisions of the lower courts, ruling that psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to work related physical injuries are compensable, and ordering a decision in this case which is consistent with that long standing principle.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

The issue in this case is a simple one: Are psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to work related physical injuries compensable under the Ohio workers' compensation system. The Supreme Court of Ohio, along with Ohio's appellate courts, have long indicated that such conditions are compensable (while at the same time distinguishing that psychological conditions that lack a contemporaneous physical injury are not compensable). *McCrone v. Bank One Corp.* (2005), 107 Ohio St.3d 272, *Bunger v. Lawson Co.* (1998), 82 Ohio St.3d 463, *Rambaldo v. Accurate Die Casting* (1992), 65 Ohio St.3d 281, *State ex rel. Clark v. Indus. Comm.* (2001), 92 Ohio St.3d 455, 459, *Andolsek v. Kirtland* (11th Dist. 1994), 99 Ohio

App.3d 333, 335; *Connors v. Sterling Milk Co.* (3rd Dist. 1993), 98 Ohio App.3d 711; *Grant*, 86 Ohio App.3d 76. These cases make it clear that lines may be drawn to protect the workers' compensation system; the line that has been drawn for psychological conditions has been defined as separating psychological conditions which arise from job related stressors only, in which case the conditions are excluded, and conditions which can be tied directly to work related injuries, in which case the conditions are compensable. *Id.*

Most significant among these cases is *McCrone v. Bank One Corp.* (2005), 107 Ohio St.3d 272, 2005-Ohio-6505, in which the Court specifically states, "The General Assembly has determined that those who have mental conditions along with compensable physical injury or occupational disease are covered within the workers' compensation system, *** ." *McCrone*, 107 Ohio St.3d ¶ 30. In dealing with the case at bar, however, the Second District Court of Appeals has ruled the long accepted standard is no longer valid, indicating that the contemporaneous injury standard has been vacated such that psychological conditions must now arise directly from a physical injury. *See Armstrong* App. Op. pp. 8-10. This decision of the Second District simply cannot be reconciled with the long history of cases that have previously addressed the compensability of psychological claims in workers' compensation claims.

By failing to comply with previously established law, the Second District has forced this Court to once again rule on an issue which it has addressed on numerous occasions. As such, Appellant simply asks that the Court rule in this case in the same manner that it has consistently ruled in the past. Such a ruling would reaffirm the previous jurisprudence of this Court on the issue of psychological conditions in workers' compensations claims. That rule has been, and should continue to be that psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to work related physical injuries are compensable, while psychological conditions that arise without a

contemporaneous physical injury are not compensable. Such a decision would overrule the decision of the appellate court in favor of a decision which is consistent with the longstanding jurisprudence on this topic. Appellant prays that the Court issue such a ruling, and, insodoing either assert that Appellant's post-traumatic stress disorder must be allowed in this claim, or, alternatively, remand the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder to the trial court for a decision consistent with the longstanding rule which dictates that contemporaneous psychological conditions are compensable in the Ohio workers' compensation system.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSITIONS OF LAW

Proposition of Law 1: Psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to work related physical injuries are compensable under the Ohio Workers' Compensation system. The appellate court decision that contemporaneous psychological conditions are not compensable was in error, as it directly contrasts *McCrone v. Bank One Corp.* (2005), 107 Ohio St.3d 272, and a host of other decisions indicating that such conditions are compensable.

The error demonstrated by the appellate court's decision in this matter is simple: it flies in the face of years of caselaw regarding which psychological conditions are compensable in workers' compensation and which are not. For decades, the Supreme Court has set forth a clear dividing line to determine whether psychological conditions can be allowed in a workers' compensation claim. That dividing line has been repeatedly pronounced as the presence of a physical injury. *McCrone*, 107 Ohio St.3d 272, *Bunger*, 82 Ohio St.3d 463, *Rambaldo, Clark*, 92 Ohio St.3d at 459, *Andolsek*, 99 Ohio App.3d at 335; *Connors*, 98 Ohio App.3d 711; *Grant*, 86 Ohio App.3d 76. If a psychological condition arises without an accompanying physical injury, it is not compensable. *Id.* If a psychological condition arises contemporaneous to a physical injury, it is compensable. *Id.*

In the case at bar, it is without dispute that post traumatic stress disorder arose contemporaneous to Appellant's physical injuries. Therefore, under prevailing caselaw, it is quite clear that the condition is compensable under Appellant's workers' compensation claim. Yet, despite the provisions set forth by this Court, the appellate court determined that the standard relating to psychological conditions has changed from the previously applied standard, and, as such, it upheld the denial of post-traumatic stress disorder in this case. *See Armstrong* App. Op. As the following will demonstrate, the appellate court's decision on this matter cannot be supported.

In order to fully understand the error presented in the appellate court's decision, it is first important to understand the standard that has been established by Ohio Courts on this matter. As has been noted previously, that standard can be simply stated as psychological conditions with contemporaneous physical injuries are compensable, while those without contemporaneous physical injury are not. This rule has been emphasized in many cases, but, as is noted in the Judge Fain's dissenting opinion in this case, the case that offers the most significant discussion on the issue is *McCrone*. *See McCrone* App. Op. pp. 13-19. As Judge Fain notes of *McCrone*, "Both the majority and dissenting opinions characterized, and discussed, the nature of the contemporaneous physical injury requirement. In the majority opinion, the 'arisen from an injury or occupational disease' formulation in R.C. 4123.01(c) is used interchangeably with the requirement of a contemporaneous physical injury." *Id.*, at p. 14. Judge Fain's dissent cited to much of Judge Lanzinger's opinion in *McCrone*, and pointed to a number of citations which demonstrate the error of the majority's determination. The following citations were all taken from *McCrone* and cited in Judge Fain's dissent:

“Psychological or psychiatric conditions without an accompanying physical injury or occupational disease, are not compensable under R.C. 4123.01(C).” *McCrone*, 107 Ohio St.3d. 272, 2005-Ohio-6505 ¶ 29.

“***, even if we were to apply *Bailey* [*v. Republic Engineered Steels, Inc.* (2001), 91 Ohio St.3d 38], physical injury is still required *** before a claimant’s mental condition becomes compensable. In *McCrone*’s case there was no physical injury whatsoever.” *Id.*, ¶ 28

The General Assembly has determined that those who have mental conditions along with compensable physical injury or occupational disease are covered within the workers’ compensation system, *** . *Id.*, ¶ 30.

***, the BWC argues that it is reasonable to classify psychological and psychiatric conditions differently from those accompanied by a physical injury. *Id.*, ¶ 33.

Although a physical injury may or may not cause a psychological or psychiatric condition, it may furnish some proof of a legitimate mental claim. *Id.*

Requiring that a mental disorder be incident to a physical injury *** is rationally related to legitimate government interests. *Id.*, at 37.

McCrone is hardly the only case to demonstrate the contemporaneous injury standard. In *State ex rel. Clark v. Industrial Commission* (2001), 92 Ohio St.3d 455, the Court noted the contemporaneous injury standard by stating “a corrections officer who suffered a psychological injury as a result of being held hostage, but without a contemporaneous physical injury, is without a remedy, under the workers’ compensation system.” *Id.*, at 459. The First Appellate District has also clearly enunciated this standard, stating, “Ohio courts have long recognized a claimant’s right to participate in the fund for mental or emotional disabilities resulting from a work-related contemporaneous physical injury.” *Grant*, 86 Ohio App.3d 76, 83.

These are just a few of the many cases in which the Court has reflected upon the contemporaneous injury standard. Clearly, the Court has long interpreted R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) to provide for the allowance of psychological conditions sustained contemporaneous to physical injuries. As the decisions of the appellate court and the trial court in this case both fly in the face of those decisions, Appellant prays that this Court will vacate those decisions, and instead offer a

decision which reaffirms the contemporaneous injury standard and orders the trial court to issue an opinion consistent with that standard.

Proposition of Law 2: The addition of the words “sustained by that claimant” to R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) should not force the Court to abandon its long standing policy that psychological conditions sustained contemporaneous to physical injuries are compensable. That language merely intends to bar psychological conditions sustained contemporaneous to injuries suffered by individuals other than the claimant in question.

In the majority decision, the Appellate Court did not deny that *McCrone* and other similar cases do not provide the basis for the allowance of psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to physical injuries. *See McCrone*, App. Op. Instead, the Court opined that the long history of rulings on this subject have been rendered worthless by a change in language to R.C. 4123.01(C)(1), a change that even the majority opinion itself admits was designed to counter *Bailey v. Republic Engineered Steels, Inc.*, 91 Ohio St.3d 38, 2001-Ohio-236, a case which had previously permitted the allowance of psychological conditions sustained when arising from the witness of injuries to a worker other than the individual who developed the psychological condition. *Id.* The change in statute was clearly designed to prevent an injured worker’ from claiming psychological conditions when he/she sustained no contemporaneous physical injury to him/herself. The code clearly did not intend to extend so far as to change the longstanding legacy of law which allows psychological conditions when the individual actually does sustain contemporaneous injuries.

In light of R.C. 4123.95, which requires that the law “shall be liberally construed in favor of employees and the dependents of deceased employees[,]” the appellate court’s extension of the changes in R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) is extremely inappropriate. This is particularly clear when noting what the actual changes to R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) demonstrate. Prior to its amendment, 4123.01(C)(1) excluded “psychiatric conditions except where the conditions have arisen from an

injury or occupational disease.” Following the amendment, R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) excludes, “psychiatric conditions except where the claimant’s psychiatric conditions have arisen from an injury or occupational disease sustained by that claimant . . .” As one can see, the changes added the words “**sustained by that claimant.**” The change did not change the previously discussed causation standard at all. Both before and after the amendment, the code required the psychological condition to arise from an injury or occupational disease. The only substantive change in the code was the specification that the injury or occupational disease must be sustained “by the claimant.” R.C. 4123.01(C)(1). Clearly, this change was aimed solely at the *Bailey* decision. It clearly would not impact the longstanding line of caselaw which has interpreted the words “arising from an injury or occupational disease” as including the suffering of contemporaneous physical and psychological injuries, as the language which has been interpreted to include those injuries did not change.

Based on this analysis, it is clear that the appellate court erred in finding that the changes to R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) invalidated the Court’s discussions in cases such as *McCrone*. In *McCrone*, the Court ruled that the exclusion of “psychiatric conditions except where the conditions have arisen from an injury or occupational disease” excepted for the allowance of psychological conditions which arose contemporaneous to the physical injury. The legislature did not alter the language upon which those decisions were based. It only added a provision to ensure that the injuries being discussed were suffered by the injured worker claiming the psychological condition. As such, based on the language of R.C. 4123.01(C)(1), it is clear that the legislature did not intend to wipe out the long line of caselaw on this topic, and, as such, it is clear the appellate court’s decision was in error and must be overruled.

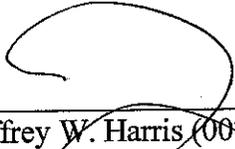
CONCLUSION

The issue before the Court in this case is one of great importance. For years, the workers' compensation system has accepted that psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to physical injuries are compensable. Upholding the decision of the appellate court would therefore, present a break from a well established rule accepted throughout the workers' compensation system, and a myriad of injured workers would be denied coverage for conditions which undeniably arise in relation to a work related injury. Under the standard propounded by the appellate court, a police officer shot in the line of duty could be denied coverage for the psychological trauma related to his injuries if it determined that their psychological conditions arose from witnessing the gun drawn rather than being hit by bullets, and, of course, a truck driver who unquestionably develops post-traumatic stress disorder as the result of a work related automobile accident would be denied coverage for his psychological trauma based on the preposterous argument that his condition arose from merely being involved in the accident and not at all from being injured in the course of that accident. This was clearly not the intent of the legislature.

R.C. 4123.01 does not intend to prevent any of the above described claims. As explained by this Court many times over, R.C. 4123.01 only serves to draw a line between psychological conditions which can be related to physical injuries and those that cannot. The line that has always been drawn in the past has been that only psychological conditions that arise from psychological trauma are not compensable. Psychological conditions which arise out of or contemporaneous to physical conditions have always been deemed compensable. No effort has ever been made to change this rule legislatively. The only change in the statute that has been offered recently served merely to prevent third parties from pursuing claims related to injuries to

other workers. As such, the rule has not changed from that stated repeatedly by this Court in recent years.

As stated in *McCrone* and in the multitude of cases cited above, psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to physical injuries are compensable in the workers' compensation system. Since the decision of the court of appeals does not comply with the Supreme Court's jurisprudence on this issue, that decision is clearly in error. As such, Appellant prays that this Court issue a decision consistent with its previous ruling by vacating the decisions of the lower courts, ruling that psychological conditions which arise contemporaneous to work related physical injuries are compensable, and ordering a decision in this case which is consistent with that long standing principle.



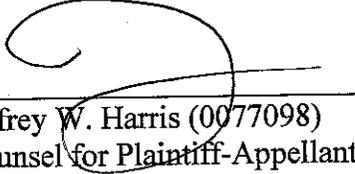
Jeffrey W. Harris (0077098)
Harris & Burgin
9545 Kenwood Road, Suite 301
Cincinnati, OH 45242
Phone: (513) 891-3270
Attorney for Plaintiff-Appellant, Shaun Armstrong

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that a copy of the foregoing was served via ordinary U.S. mail, postage prepaid, this 11 day of July, 2012 upon the following:

Corey Crognale
Ice Miller
250 West Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Colleen Erdman
Assistant Attorney General
Workers' Compensation Section
150 E. Gay Street, 22nd Floor
Columbus, OH 43215



Jeffrey W. Harris (0077098)
Counsel for Plaintiff-Appellant

APPENDIX

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

SHAUN ARMSTRONG

Appellant,

v.

JOHN R. JURGENSON CO., et al.

Appellees.

Case No.

12-0244

On Appeal from the Clark
County Court of Appeals
Second Appellate District

Court of Appeals
Case No. 2011-CA-6

NOTICE OF DISCRETIONARY APPEAL OF APPELLANT, SHAUN ARMSTRONG

Jeffrey Harris (0077098)
Harris & Burgin, L.P.A.
9545 Kenwood Rd. Suite 301
Cincinnati, OH 45242
(513) 891-3270
(513) 7891-3266 (fax)
jh@harris-burgin.com

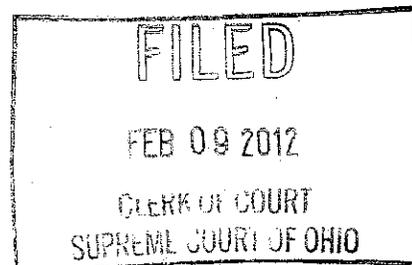
COUNSEL FOR APPELLANT, SHAUN ARMSTRONG

Corey Crognale (0017004)
Schottenstein, Zox & Dunn
250 West Street
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 462-2281
(614) 224-3284 (fax)
ccrognale@szd.com

COUNSEL FOR APPELLEE, JOHN R. JURGENSEN CO.

Colleen Erdman (0080765)
Assistant Attorney General
Workers' Compensation Section
150 E. Gay Street, 22nd Floor
Columbus, OH 43215-3130
(614) 466-6696
(614) 728-9535 (fax)
Colleen.erdman@ohioattorneygeneral.gov

COUNSEL FOR APPELEE, BUREAU OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION



Notice of Discretionary Appeal of Appellant Shaun Armstrong

Appellant, Shaun Armstrong, hereby gives notice of appeal to the Supreme Court of Ohio from the judgment of The Court of Appeals, Second Appellate District of Ohio, Clark County, entered in case number 2011-CA-6 on December 28, 2011.

This case is one of public or great general interest.

Respectfully submitted,



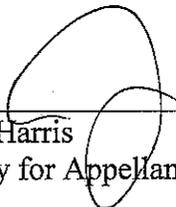
Jeffrey Harris (0077098)
Harris & Burgin, L.P.A.
9545 Kenwood Road, Suite 301
Cincinnati, OH 45242
(513) 891-3270
(513) 891-3266 (fax)
jh@harris-burgin.com
Attorney for Appellant, Shaun Armstrong

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that a true and accurate copy of the foregoing Notice of Appeal of Appellant, Shaun Armstrong has been served by regular U.S. Mail, postage pre-paid, this 0 day of February 2012 upon the following:

Corey Crognale
Schottenstein, Zox & Dunn
250 West Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Colleen Erdman
Assistant Attorney General
Workers' Compensation Section
150 E. Gay Street, 22nd Floor
Columbus, OH 43215-3130



Jeffrey Harris
Attorney for Appellant, Shaun Armstrong

**RONALD E VINCENT CLARK COUNTY CLERK OF COURTS
COURT OF COMMON PLEAS AND COURT OF APPEALS**

101 N. LIMESTONE STREET
PO BOX 1008
SPRINGFIELD, OHIO 45501
(937) 521-1680

December 29, 2011

NOTICE OF THE FILING OF FINAL ENTRY

**CASE NO: 11CA0006 CAPTION:
SHAUN ARMSTRONG vs. JOHN R JURGENSON COMPANY**

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9545 KENWOOD ROAD, STE 301
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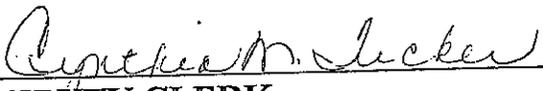
HARRIS & BURGIN

Please be advised that the Final Entry has been filed in the above

captioned case on: **DECEMBER 28, 2011.**

Disposition as follows: **JUDGMENT OF THE TRIAL COURT IS AFFIRMED**

**RONALD E VINCENT, CLERK OF COURTS
COMMON PLEAS COURT AND COURT OF
APPEALS**


DEPUTY CLERK

COREY V CROGNALE

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF CLARK COUNTY, OHIO

SHAUN ARMSTRONG

Plaintiff-Appellant

vs.

JOHN R. JURGENSON CO., et al.

Defendants-Appellees

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C.A. CASE NO. 2011-CA-6

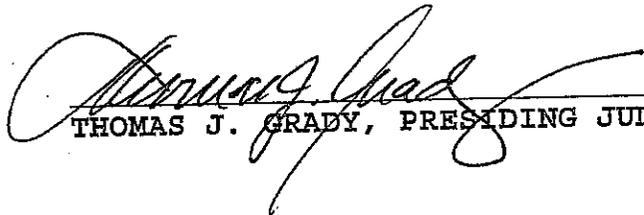
T.C. CASE NO. 10-CV-212

FINAL ENTRY

.....

Pursuant to the opinion of this court rendered on the
23rd day of December, 2011, the judgment of the trial
court is Affirmed. Costs are to be paid as provided in App.R.

24.



THOMAS J. GRADY, PRESIDING JUDGE

MIKE FAIN, JUDGE



MICHAEL T. HALL, JUDGE

Copies mailed to:

Jeffrey W. Harris, Esq.
9545 Kenwood Road, Suite 301
Cincinnati, OH 45242

Corey V. Crognale, Esq.
250 West Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Colleen Erdman, Esq.
150 East Gay Street
22nd Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Hon. Douglas M. Rastatter
101 N. Limestone Street
Springfield, OH 45502

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF CLARK COUNTY, OHIO

SHAUN ARMSTRONG :
Plaintiff-Appellant : C.A. CASE NO. 2011-CA-6
vs. : T.C. CASE NO. 10-CV-212
JOHN R. JURGENSON CO., et al. : (Civil Appeal from
Defendants-Appellees : Common Pleas Court)

O P I N I O N

Rendered on the 23rd day of December, 2011.

Jeffrey W. Harris, Atty. Reg. No. 0077098, 9545 Kenwood Road,
Suite 301, Cincinnati, OH 45242

Attorney for Plaintiff-Appellant Shaun Armstrong

Corey V. Crognale, Atty. Reg. No. 0017004, 250 West Street,
Columbus, OH 43215

Attorney for Defendant-Appellee John R. Jurgenson Co.

Colleen Erdman, Atty. Reg. No. 0080765, 150 East Gay Street, 22nd
Floor, Columbus, OH 43215

Attorney for Defendant-Appellee Ohio Bureau of Workers'
Compensation

GRADY, P.J.:

Plaintiff, Shaun Armstrong, appeals from a final judgment of the court of common pleas that denied Armstrong's claim for workers' compensation benefits on a finding that the post traumatic stress disorder from which Armstrong suffers is not a compensable injury.

In August of 2009, Defendant, John R. Jurgenson, Co.

("Jurgenson Co.") was performing work on improvements to Interstate Route 70. Armstrong was employed by Jurgenson Co. as a dump truck driver. On August 27, 2009, a van travelling at a high rate of speed struck Armstrong's fully-loaded dump truck from the rear. The driver of the van was killed. Armstrong suffered physical injuries.

Armstrong had seen the van as it approached his truck, but was unable to avoid the collision. He braced himself for the impact, which caused Armstrong's head to jerk back and forth and his arm and shoulder to impact against the truck's interior.

After the impact, Armstrong looked to the rear again and saw that the van was under his truck. After taking the truck out of gear, Armstrong sat momentarily in "total shock." When he looked to the rear through his side-view mirror, Armstrong saw the van driver's head bob up and down. Armstrong called 911 for assistance.

Armstrong saw that antifreeze, oil, and gasoline were leaking from his truck. Fearing that it might catch fire, Armstrong exited the truck. He then saw that the van driver was severely injured; the van driver's chin was on his chest and blood was coming from his nose. Armstrong waited for assistance to arrive, believing that the van driver was probably dead.

Armstrong was removed to a hospital and examined. He was diagnosed as suffering from cervical, thoracic, lumbar and left shoulder sprains, and a left post-labial tear. Armstrong was released the same day. Some months later he underwent surgery

for his shoulder injury. Armstrong filed a claim for workers' compensation benefits for these physical injuries. The claim was allowed.

Soon after the accident, Armstrong began having nightmares from which he awoke in a state of severe anxiety, also experiencing shaking and sweats. His dreams regularly involved being struck inside the dump truck following the accident, unable to get out, seeing the van driver's face, and a slow-motion re-enactment of the van hitting his dump truck.

Armstrong experienced panic attacks while riding as a passenger in an automobile, as well as other phobic responses to being in an automobile. Armstrong also experienced bouts of sadness and crying spells in response to references to the van driver and his family.

In September of 2009, Dr. Jennifer J. Stoeckel, a licensed psychologist, diagnosed Armstrong's symptoms as post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD"). Armstrong amended his workers' compensation claim for his physical injuries to include his PTSD injury, which the Industrial Commission allowed.

Jurgenson Co. appealed from the Industrial Commission's order to the court of common pleas. Prior to trial, Armstrong filed a motion in limine to prohibit any claim by Jurgenson Co. that a psychological injury is not compensable when it arises contemporaneous with a compensable physical injury or condition. [Dkt. 18]. The record does not indicate that the trial court ruled on the motion. The parties stipulated to the following

facts:

"1) Shaun Armstrong was involved in a motor vehicle accident during the course of his employment with John R. Jurgenson Co. on August 27, 2009, when his vehicle was struck from behind by an oncoming motorist.

"2) As a result of the motor vehicle accident which occurred on August 27, 2009, Mr. Armstrong suffers from conditions which include a cervical sprain, thoracic sprain, lumbar sprain, lumbar sprain, left shoulder sprain and left posterior labral tear.

"3) Mr. Armstrong suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder." [Dkt. 19].

The case was tried to the court. In addition to Armstrong's testimony, the court heard the expert witness testimony of Armstrong's expert, Dr. Stoeckel, and Jurgenson Co.'s expert, Dr. William Howard, who is also a licensed psychologist, by video deposition. The experts agreed that Armstrong suffers from PTSD. The disagreement was in its origin.

Dr. Stoeckel testified that, in her opinion, Armstrong suffers from PTSD as a result of the motor vehicle collision of August 27, 2009. She explained that PTSD requires a traumatic event, in this instance the accident that resulted in Armstrong's physical injuries, and therefore that Armstrong suffers from PTSD as a result of that work-related accident. Dr. Stoeckel opined that Armstrong's physical injuries "contributed to" (Tr. 19) his PTSD, and that his physical injuries "definitely . . . were causal factors" (Tr. 33) in Armstrong's development of PTSD.

Dr. Howard testified that a diagnosis of PTSD "means . . . that you're exposed to a severe environmental stressor of some sort . . . (that) . . . creates an indelible effect on your mental state," adding:

"And then what happens is, even in other activities, your mind has a videotape of this and keeps referring back to that event via nightmares, flashbacks, revivification experiences, et cetera, and then it can be associated with tendencies to avoid some of the circumstances surrounding the initial trauma or injury. Because that has a tendency to reactivate some of these flashbacks, nightmares and whatnot.

"So, basically, it's this exposure to a severe trauma, and you keep reexperiencing this trauma in different situations afterwards for a period of time." (Tr. 10-11).

After being asked for his opinion whether Armstrong's PTSD arose out of his physical injuries, Dr. Howard testified:

"Well, my opinion is that it was not actually caused by the physical conditions, the cervicothoracic lumbar problems. It was actually caused by being a visual witness of the incident. The trauma that caused the posttraumatic stress disorder would not be a strain injury or a physical injury. It would be the mental observation of the severity of the injury. The fatality, the fact that it could have been life-threatening to him at some point, that sort of thing.

"Q. Then do you believe, within a reasonable degree of psychological certainty and probability, as to whether Mr.

Armstrong's physical injuries had no impact on the proximate cause of his posttraumatic stress disorder?

"A. Yes. That's - yeah, I guess that's what I was saying earlier, that the - even if he didn't have any injury, physical injury, I think he still would have a posttraumatic stress disorder because of, you know, the life-threatening nature of the incident, the fact that someone else died during the accident. It's all this - the experience of the injury or the incident, not the actual physical trauma." (Deposition Tr., pp. 20-21.)

The trial court held that Armstrong's claim for PTSD was not allowed because "[i]n strictly construing the definition of injury under [R. C. 4123.01(C)] * * * plaintiff's PTSD did not arise out of his physical injuries." [Dkt. 21].

From the judgment of the trial court disallowing his claim for PTSD, Armstrong appeals.

ASSIGNMENT OF ERROR

"THE TRIAL COURT ERRED WHEN IT FOUND THAT PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS SUFFERED CONTEMPORANEOUS TO RECOGNIZED PHYSICAL INJURIES ARE NOT COMPENSABLE UNDER THE OHIO WORKERS' COMPENSATION SYSTEM."

Section 35, Article II of the Ohio Constitution authorizes the General Assembly to enact laws "[f]or the purpose of providing compensation to workmen and their dependents, for death, injuries or occupational disease, occasioned in the course of such workmen's employment . . ."

The Workers Compensation Act, R.C. Chapter 4123, was enacted to protect those who suffer injuries arising out of and in the course of their employment. *Ruddy v. Industrial Commission* (1950), 153 Ohio St. 475. The rights the Act confers are purely statutory, and because such statutory rights are not based on principles of the common law, they are limited to those conferred by statute. *Westenberger v. Industrial Commission* (1939), 135 Ohio St. 211.

When exercising its constitutional power, the General Assembly may include all reasonable provisions that are necessary to make the law effective and to accomplish its stated purpose. *Fassig v. State* (1917), 95 Ohio St. 232. R.C. 4123.95 declares that the law "shall be liberally construed in favor of employees and the dependents of deceased employees." However, the principle of liberal construction cannot be applied to permit an award of compensation in the case of an injury that clearly falls outside the comprehension of the statute. *Georgejakakis v. Wheeling Steel Corporation* (1949), 151 Ohio St. 458; *State ex rel. Jonak v. Beall* (1940), 136 Ohio St. 213.

R.C. 4123.01(C) states:

"'Injury' includes any injury, whether caused by external accidental means or accidental in character and result, received in the course of, and arising out of, the injured employee's employment. 'Injury' does not include:

"(1) Psychiatric conditions except where the claimant's psychiatric conditions have arisen from an injury or occupational

disease sustained by that claimant or where the claimant's psychiatric conditions have arisen from sexual conduct in which the claimant was forced by threat of physical harm to engage or participate." (Emphasis supplied.)

R.C. 4123.01(C) was amended by 2006 S 7. Prior to its amendment, that section defined an injury to exclude: "(1) Psychiatric conditions except where the conditions have arisen from an injury or occupational disease." The further limitation that the injury or disease must have been "sustained by that claimant" were added by 2006 S 7, apparently in response to the holding in *Bailey v. Republic Engineered Steels, Inc.*, 91 Ohio St.3d 38, 2001-Ohio-236.

In *Bailey*, an employee suffered debilitating depression as a result of an accident in which he killed a coworker. The Supreme Court held that a psychiatric condition arising from a compensable injury suffered by a third party was not precluded from the definition of an injury under the terms of R.C. 4123.01(C) (1). The General Assembly subsequently limited compensable psychiatric conditions suffered by a claimant to those which "have arisen from an injury or occupational disease sustained by that claimant" by enacting 2006 S 7, which became effective on June 30, 2006. The accident that occasioned Armstrong's PTSD occurred on August 27, 2009, and his claim is plainly controlled by the 2006 amendment.

Armstrong, relying on case law decided prior to the enactment of 2006 S 7, argues that, to be compensable, a

psychiatric condition need only be contemporaneous with a compensable physical injury. We do not agree.

The required nexus between a compensable psychiatric condition and an injury sustained by the claimant that R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) imposes is that the psychiatric condition must have "arisen from" the injury. "From" is a preposition "used as a function word to indicate a starting point." Webster's Third New International Dictionary. To be compensable, a psychiatric condition must have been started by and therefore result from a physical injury or occupational disease the claimant suffered. Conversely, "for purpose of R.C. Chapter 4123, psychiatric conditions that do not result from a physical injury do not constitute an 'injury.'" *Bunger v. Lawson Milk Company* (1998), 82 Ohio St.3d 463, 464.

In *State ex rel. Clark v. Industrial Commission* (2001), 92 Ohio St.3d 455, the Supreme Court held that "a corrections officer who suffered a psychological injury as a result of being held hostage, but without a contemporaneous physical injury, is without a remedy, under the workers' compensation system." *Id.*, at 459.

In *McCrone v. Bank One Corporation*, 107 Ohio St.3d 272, 2005-Ohio-6505, in which the claimant likewise suffered no physical injury at all, the Supreme Court held, at ¶29: "Psychological or psychiatric conditions, without an accompanying physical injury or occupational disease, are not compensable under R.C. 4123.01(C)(1)."

The term "contemporaneous" connotes a temporal nexus, not a causative nexus. Two things are contemporaneous when they arise, exist, or occur at the same time. *State ex rel. Clark* used the term contemporaneous to illustrate the lack of any causative nexus, because in that case the claimant suffered no physical injury at all. Neither *State ex rel. Clark* nor *McCrone v. Banc One Corp.*, hold that a psychiatric or psychological condition arises from a physical injury because the two coincide in time. Both cases hold that the condition must also be a product of a physical injury. As amended by 2006 S 7, R.C. 4123.01(C)(1) requires that, in addition, the physical injury must be one that the claimant suffered in order for the claimant's psychological injury to be compensable.

The trial court correctly construed the exclusion from coverage for psychiatric conditions in R.C. 4123.01(C)(1). Further, there was competent, credible evidence from which the court could find that Armstrong's psychiatric condition did not arise from the physical injuries he suffered, but was instead the result of the horrific injuries that caused the death of the other driver when their vehicles collided. Dr. Howard testified that Armstrong's PTSD was not caused by his physical injuries from the accident but instead was "caused by being a visual witness of the" accident. He reviewed the available medical evidence and provided a sound basis for his conclusion. The court was free to reject the testimony of Dr. Stoeckel, which tended to support Armstrong's "contemporaneous event" theory. Therefore,

the trial court's judgment is not against the manifest weight of the evidence and must be affirmed. *C.E. Morris Co. v. Foley Construction Company*.

The assignment of error is overruled. The judgment of the trial court will be affirmed.

HALL, J., concurs.

FAIN, J., dissenting:

I would find that Armstrong's post-traumatic stress syndrome is a compensable psychiatric condition under the Workers' Compensation Statutes, reverse the judgment of the trial court, and remand for further proceedings.

R. C. 4123.01(C)(1) defines "injury," as used in workers' compensation laws. In relevant part, it reads:

" 'Injury' includes any injury, whether caused by external accidental means or accidental in character and result, received in the course of, and arising out of, the injured employee's employment. 'Injury' does not include: (1) Psychiatric conditions except where the claimant's psychiatric conditions have arisen from an injury * * * sustained by that claimant * * * ."

The primary goal in statutory interpretation is to give effect to the legislature's intent. *Bailey v. Republic Engineered Steels, Inc.* (2001), 91 Ohio St.3d 38, 39, 2001-Ohio-236. In determining legislative intent, the court

first looks to the statute's language. Id. The court must give effect to the words used in the statute, and not delete or insert words. Id. at 39-40. If the statute's meaning is unambiguous and definite, it must be applied as written. Id. at 40.

Neither party disputes that Armstrong suffered a compensable physical injury, that he suffered PTSD, or that his physical injuries at least contributed to his PTSD. The parties disagree about how to construe the language "arisen from an injury * * * sustained by that claimant * * * ." Armstrong argues that the wording should be interpreted as requiring a claimant to show only that he suffered his psychiatric condition contemporaneously with his compensable physical injury. Jurgenson argues that the wording shows the legislature's intent to distinguish between those psychiatric conditions that arise from physical injuries and those that are reactions to the injurious event or to the injuries of other persons. Jurgenson argues that only the former would be compensable. Jurgenson asserts that, in line with the expert testimony, Armstrong's physical injuries only "contributed" to the development of the PTSD, making the relationship between Armstrong's injuries and his PTSD correlative, not causal.

The statutory limitation restricts participation to a psychiatric condition that has "arisen from an injury" sustained by the claimant. The term "injury" refers both to the hurt, damage, or loss sustained, and to the act that damages, harms, or hurts. Webster's Third New International Dictionary (G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1969), 1164. "INJURY, HURT, DAMAGE, HARM, and MISCHIEF mean in common the act or result of inflicting on a person or thing something that causes loss, pain, distress, or impairment." Id.

Read narrowly, the statutory restriction would require that the psychiatric condition must result from the harm caused by a physical injury. Read liberally, the statutory restriction would require only that the psychiatric condition must result from the act that causes a physical injury.

I find *McCrone v. Bank One Corp.*, 107 Ohio St.3d 272, 2005-Ohio-6505, to be helpful. That case involved the constitutionality of the contemporaneous physical injury requirement for compensation for a psychological or psychiatric injury. Justice Lanziger wrote the majority opinion, holding that the requirement does not violate the equal protection clauses of the federal or Ohio constitutions; Justice Lundberg Stratton wrote a concurring

opinion; and Justice Resnick wrote the dissenting opinion, opining that the contemporaneous physical injury requirement does violate the equal protection clauses.

Both the majority and dissenting opinions characterized, and discussed, the nature of the contemporaneous physical injury requirement. In the majority opinion, the "arisen from an injury or occupational disease" formulation in R.C. 4123.01(C) is used interchangeably with the requirement of a contemporaneous physical injury:

"Psychological or psychiatric conditions, without an accompanying physical injury or occupational disease, are not compensable under R.C. 4123.01(C)." *Id.*, ¶ 29.

" * * * , even if we were to apply *Bailey [v. Republic Engineered Steels, Inc. (2001), 91 Ohio St.3d 38]*, physical injury is still required * * * before a claimant's mental condition becomes compensable. In *McCrone's* case, there was no physical injury whatsoever." *Id.*, ¶ 28.

"The General Assembly has determined that those who have mental conditions along with compensable physical injury or occupational disease are covered within the workers' compensation system, * * * ." *Id.*, ¶ 30.

" * * * , the BWC argues that it is reasonable to classify psychological and psychiatric conditions

differently from those accompanied by physical injury." Id., ¶ 33.

"Although a physical injury may or may not cause a psychological or psychiatric condition, it may furnish some proof of a legitimate mental claim." Id.

"We accept the appellant Bureau of Workers' Compensation's position and hold that R.C. 4123.01(C) does not violate the Equal Protection Clauses of the United States and Ohio Constitutions by excluding from the definition of 'injury' psychological or psychiatric conditions that do not arise from a compensable physical injury or occupational disease." Id., ¶ 36.

"Requiring that a mental disorder be incident to a physical injury * * * is rationally related to legitimate governmental interests." Id., ¶ 37.

The dissenting opinion is even more instructive when it points out the minimal differences in circumstances that could result in one worker's mental condition being compensated, while another worker's mental condition is not:

"And yet this same injury - posttraumatic stress disorder - would be fully covered under the statute if only the bank robber had been considerate enough of appellee's compensation position to have shoved her during the robbery so that she could stub her toe and acquire the physical

element that is deemed so essential to her right of recovery." Id. ¶ 43.

"Or consider the situation in which the bank robber fires a gun at the teller but narrowly misses. Can it really be concluded with any measure of rationality that there are reasonable grounds for making compensability of the teller's posttraumatic stress disorder turn on whether she had the 'good fortune' from a coverage standpoint to have twisted her back or sprained a finger upon recoiling at the prospect of being shot to death? Does the injured back or finger under these circumstances, or the stubbed toe in the previous scenario, really provide such independent verification of the posttraumatic stress disorder as to be rationally determinative of its compensability?" Id., ¶ 44.

Nowhere in the majority opinion in *McCrone* is there a disclaimer of the compensation hypothesized for the hypothetical situations set forth in the dissenting opinion. Both the majority and dissenting opinions in *McCrone* treat the physical injury requirement as merely requiring that a physical injury must accompany the psychological or psychiatric injury for which workers' compensation is sought - that is, that the psychological or psychiatric injury must result from the act (the "injury") that caused physical harm.

I do not conclude that *Bunger v. Lawson Milk Company* (1998), 82 Ohio St.3d 463, requires more than that a physical injury must accompany the psychological or psychiatric injury for which workers' compensation is sought. To begin with, the facts in that case did not involve any physical injury at all. Furthermore, Justice Lundberg-Stratton, whose concurring opinion was necessary to the majority (only two other justices concurred in Justice Pfeifer's opinion for the court), clearly deemed the requirement to be merely that a physical injury must accompany the psychological or psychiatric injury:

" * * * , psychological injuries without accompanying physical injury are specifically excluded from compensable injuries under the workers' compensation statutes."

" * * * , when the employee sustains a psychological injury in the workplace without a physical injury, the employee is prevented from seeking recovery for the injury because it is not covered under the workers' compensation system."

"A psychological injury may exist without a concurrent physical injury. It is time that such a psychological injury be recognized as compensable in the workers' compensation system. [Recognizing, however, that the law was presently

otherwise.]” *Bunger v. Lawson Co.* (1998), 82 Ohio St.3d 463, 467.

The workers' compensation statutes “shall be liberally construed in favor of employees.” R. C. 4123.95.

Liberal construction means giving “generously all that the statute authorizes,” and “adopting the most comprehensive meaning of the statutory terms * * * to accomplish the aims of the Act and to advance its purpose, with all reasonable doubts resolved in favor of the applicability of the statute to the particular case. Interpretation and construction should not result in a decision so technical or narrow as to defeat the compensatory objective of the Act.” *Bailey v. Republic Engineered Steels, Inc.*, 91 Ohio St.3d at 40, quoting *Fulton, Ohio Workers' Compensation Law* (2 Ed.1998) 9, Section 1.7.

I conclude that a liberal construction of R.C. 4123.01(C) would require us to hold that a psychological or psychiatric condition is compensable if it otherwise meets the requirements for participation in the workers' compensation system and is contemporaneous with a compensable physical injury. This construction of the statute is at least suggested by, if not commanded by, both the majority and dissenting opinions in *McCrone v. Bank One*

Corporation, 107 Ohio St.3d 272, 2005-Ohio-6505. But see *Dunn v. Mayfield* (1990), 66 Ohio App.3d 336, a decision pre-dating *McCrone*, which suggests otherwise.¹

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Copies mailed to:

- Jeffrey W. Harris, Esq.
- Corey V. Crognale, Esq.
- Colleen Erdman, Esq.
- Hon. Douglas M. Rastatter

¹While appellant faces the unenviable task of establishing that his post-traumatic stress disorder was proximately caused by his cut fingers, burning eyes and lungs and not the emotional stress he describes as being the causative factor in his psychiatric examination by Dr. Brown, he has stated a cause of action." 66 Ohio App.3d 342.

JAN 28 2011

HARRIS & BURGIN

IN THE COMMON PLEAS COURT OF CLARK COUNTY, OHIO

SHAUN ARMSTRONG

*

CASE NUMBER: 10-CV-212

PLAINTIFF,

*

vs.

*

JOHN R. JURGENSON CO. et al.,

*

ENTRY

*

DEFENDANTS.

* * * * *

NON VINGENT. OLERY
COMMON PLEAS COURT
CLARK COUNTY, OHIO

2011 JAN 27 AM 8:03

FILED

This matter was before the Court on January 19, 2011 for a civil bench trial. The plaintiff was present with counsel, Jeffrey Harris, and a representative of John R. Jurgenson Co. was present with counsel, Corey Crognale. The case revolves around workers' compensation benefits.

Plaintiff's claims for cervical strain, thoracic strain, lumbar strain, and post-traumatic stress disorder have previously been allowed.

This matter is before the Court on the defendant's appeal of the Industrial Commission's allowance of benefits for post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Court heard testimony from Shaun Armstrong and plaintiff's expert witness, Dr. Stoeckel, who is a licensed psychologist. The Court also heard testimony from defense expert, Dr. Howard, who is also a licensed psychologist. The Court has considered that testimony, the exhibits offered, the arguments of counsel, and the law.

The parties stipulated to the following facts:

1. Shaun Armstrong was involved in a motor vehicle accident during the course of his employment with John R. Jurgenson Co. on August 27, 2009, when his vehicle was struck from behind by an oncoming motorist.
2. As a result of the motor vehicle accident which occurred on August 27, 2009, Mr. Armstrong suffers from conditions which include a cervical sprain, thoracic sprain, lumbar sprain, left shoulder sprain, and left posterior labral tear.
3. Mr. Armstrong suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The issue before the Court is whether the plaintiff's workers' compensation claim for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) should be allowed under the law.

Ohio Revised Code Section 4123.01(C) defines injury to include "any injury . . . received in the course of, and arising out of, the injured employee's employment." That section expressly excludes psychiatric conditions, such as PTSD, except where "the claimant's psychiatric conditions have arisen from an injury or occupational disease sustained by that claimant"

Plaintiff argues his claim for PTSD should be allowed because it came about contemporaneously with his physical injuries and that this psychiatric condition cannot be separated out from those physical injuries.

The defendant argues that plaintiff's PTSD did not *arise out of* his physical injuries. He argues that the PTSD would have developed in plaintiff even if he sustained no physical injuries. In other words, the defendant argues that the accident, not the physical injuries, triggered the PTSD.

In strictly construing the definition of injury under Section 4123.01(C) of the Ohio Revised Code, the Court finds that plaintiff's psychiatric condition of PTSD did not *arise out of* his physical injuries. Accordingly, the Court finds that his workers' compensation claim for PTSD is not allowed under the law.

IT IS SO ORDERED.



DOUGLAS M. RASTATTER, JUDGE

cc: Jeffrey Harris
Corey Crognale