

SUMMARY STATEMENT

State of Idaho v. Mildred Eileen Couch

Docket No. 47892

In this case arising out of Canyon County, the Court of Appeals vacated Mildred Eileen Couch's judgment of conviction for possession of a controlled substance. Responding to an anonymous tip of drug activity, an officer approached Couch (who was sitting in a parked vehicle), questioned her, and obtained her driver's license. The officer handed the driver's license to another officer to run through dispatch. Before dispatch reported back, a drug dog arrived and alerted to the presence of drugs in Couch's vehicle. Searches of Couch's person and vehicle yielded two syringes (one of which had methamphetamine residue) and a glass pipe. The State charged Couch with possession of a controlled substance and drug paraphernalia.

Couch moved to suppress the evidence, contending the officer lacked reasonable suspicion to detain her by retaining her driver's license. The district court denied Couch's motion, holding that, although she was detained, the detention to check her driver's license was justified because the officer had a "legitimate reason to contact" her. Couch moved for reconsideration, which the district court denied. After denial of the motion for reconsideration, Couch pled guilty to possession of a controlled substance. Couch appealed.

On appeal, Couch argued that the district court erred by applying a "legitimate reason" standard in lieu of requiring reasonable suspicion for her detention. Couch also argued that the officer lacked reasonable suspicion to detain her. The Court of Appeals held that the district court erred by applying a "legitimate reason" standard and that, instead, the officer needed reasonable suspicion to detain Couch. The Court of Appeals also held that the anonymous tip, by itself, was not sufficiently reliable to provide reasonable suspicion. Finally, the Court of Appeals held that Couch's demeanor was insufficient to provide reasonable suspicion even when combined with the other facts known to the officer.

This summary constitutes no part of the opinion of the Court, but has been prepared by court staff for the convenience of the public.