

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Wurdemann v. State

Docket No. 50403

This case presents an issue of first impression regarding the “Idaho Wrongful Conviction Act.” I.C. §§ 6-3501–3505. The Act provides a statutory right to compensation for wrongfully convicted claimants who satisfy seven statutory requirements. Among the requirements, a claimant must establish that “the basis for reversing or vacating the conviction was not legal error unrelated to his factual innocence.” I.C. § 6-3502(2)(g).

John David Wurdemann was charged and later convicted of seven felonies, all related to an attack against a woman in 2000. Sixteen years later, a district court granted Wurdemann’s petition for post-conviction relief and vacated his conviction after concluding that Wurdemann had been denied his right to effective assistance of counsel during his trial. Wurdemann has not been retried.

Shortly after the Act was passed, Wurdemann filed a petition seeking monetary compensation and a certificate of innocence. The State opposed and moved for summary judgment, arguing that Wurdemann was not factually innocent of the crime. The district court agreed, concluding that there was not a genuine issue of material fact and that Wurdemann had not established that “the basis for reversing or vacating the conviction was not legal error unrelated to his factual innocence.” I.C. § 6-3502(2)(g). Wurdemann timely appealed to the Idaho Supreme Court.

The Idaho Supreme Court first addressed the difficulties in interpreting the statute based on the legislature’s use of a double negative in the phrase “*not* legal error *unrelated* to factual innocence.” (Emphasis added). The Court then concluded that because Wurdemann had not shown that his prior convictions were vacated on the basis of “legal error related to his factual innocence,” Wurdemann could not satisfy a requisite element of his claim. Accordingly, the Court affirmed the district court’s grant of summary judgment to the State.

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