

Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal State of Louisiana

No. 26-K-461

STATE OF LOUISIANA

versus

CHRIS WILLIAMSON

IN RE STATE OF LOUISIANA
APPLYING FOR SUPERVISORY WRIT FROM THE FORTIETH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT,
PARISH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, STATE OF LOUISIANA, DIRECTED TO THE HONORABLE
NGHANA LEWIS, DIVISION "B", No. 22,56

TRUE COPY

October 01, 2026



LINDA TRAN
DEPUTY CLERK

Panel composed of Judges Jude G. Gravois,
Marc E. Johnson, and Timothy S. Marcel

WRIT GRANTED; RULING REVERSED; STAY LIFTED

Defendant, Chris Willamson is charged with second degree murder, in violation of La. R.S. 14:30.1, and obstruction of justice, in violation of La. R.S. 14:130.1, arising from the February 11, 2022 shooting death of Brandon Morris. In this application, the State of Louisiana seeks supervisory review of the trial court's mid-trial ruling granting defendant's motion for a mistrial under La. C.Cr.P. art. 770(2).

For context, the transcript reflects that on direct examination, the State elicited testimony as to Ms. Gray's recollection of the events of the night of the shooting. On cross-examination, defense counsel

questioned Ms. Gray about a previous interaction at a game night between Ms. Gray and the defendant—the same prior interaction Ms. Gray had described in a recorded statement to investigators. On redirect, the State asked follow-up questions regarding the previous game night interaction. The defense contemporaneously objected, and the trial court overruled the objection, finding that the defense had opened the door to the line of questioning. After her testimony, and after a recess, the defense moved for a mistrial. The trial court granted the motion.

La. C.Cr.P. art. 770(2) provides that, upon motion of a defendant, a mistrial shall be ordered when a remark or comment, made within the hearing of the jury by the judge, district attorney, or court official, during the trial or in argument, refers directly or indirectly to “[a]nother crime committed or alleged to have been committed by the defendant as to which evidence is not admissible.”

On review, we find the trial court erred in granting the defense’s motion for mistrial. A review of the transcripts provided indicate that the defense “opened the door” during cross examination of the witness to the line of questioning the State pursued during re-direct examination of the witness, as the trial court correctly ruled during re-direct examination of the witness. Also, the witness’s prior statement to investigators was provided to the defense in discovery long prior to trial. Further, there is nothing in the transcripts that indicate the testimony was deliberately elicited by the prosecutor prior to the defense opening the door to allow such testimony, nor did the State or witness clearly reference to “another crime committed or alleged to have

been committed by the defendant.” Finally, defendant has an adequate remedy on appeal if convicted.

On the showing made, we grant the writ, reverse the ruling, lift the stay, and remand for the trial to resume.

Gretna, Louisiana, this 1st day of October, 2026.

TSM
JGG

Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal State of Louisiana

NO. 26-K-461

STATE OF LOUISIANA

versus

CHRIS WILLIAMSON

JOHNSON, J., DISSENTS WITH REASONS

I, respectfully, dissent from the majority disposition that reverses the trial court's decision to grant a mistrial under La. C.Cr.P. art. 770 in this matter. On the showing made, I find that the State of Louisiana failed to show that the trial court abused its discretion by granting the mistrial.

During the cross-examination of Ms. Gray, defense counsel questioned whether she had previously spent time with Defendant, Chris Williamson, and his friend, Toi, before the night Brandon Morris was shot. Ms. Gray testified that they had previously done a "game night." Based upon that previous game night, Ms. Gray was uncomfortable but still chose to drive her friend, Angel, to Toi's apartment. On redirect examination, the prosecutor elicited further information from Ms. Gray about the previous game night. She testified that Defendant took her car keys after the game night ended, forcing her and Angel to spend the rest of the night in her car. She was unable to leave until the next morning when Defendant returned her keys. The prosecutor then questioned Ms. Gray about reporting the incident to the police, and defense counsel objected to the line of questioning. After a bench conference was held, the prosecutor asked Ms. Gray

one additional question—whether she had shown the police a video recorded from the previous incident—then indicated that he had no further questions.

Afterwards, defense counsel orally moved for a mistrial, arguing that the State committed a *Brady-Giglio* violation by failing to divulge other crimes evidence against Defendant involving the previous game night. The State maintained the position that there was no other information to produce regarding the previous incident, and the line of questioning posed to Ms. Gray was proper because defense counsel had “opened the door” to the subject of the previous game night. The trial judge then performed an in-depth inquiry into the State’s discovery evidence involving the previous game night incident, which included listening to Ms. Gray’s recorded interview with Detective Pineda. The trial judge concluded defense counsel opened the door to the State’s questioning of Ms. Gray on redirect examination. However, after considering the context of *State v. Broaden*, 99-2124 (La. 2/21/01), 780 So.2d 349, the judge found that testimony elicited from Ms. Gray was not a harmless error and was highly prejudicial. She held that Defendant should have been put on notice of the State’s other crimes evidence involving the previous game night.

Whether a mistrial should be granted is within the sound discretion of the trial court, and the grant or denial of a motion for mistrial will not be disturbed absent an abuse of discretion. *State v. Licona*, 13-543 (La. App. 5 Cir. 5/21/14), 141 So.3d 333. Prejudice assessments and rulings on mistrial motions fall to the sound discretion of the trial court. *Broaden*, 780 So.2d at 361.

After review, I find that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in granting Defendant’s motion for mistrial in this matter. The court thoroughly considered the testimony elicited from Ms. Gray on redirect examination by the State and determined that it described other crimes evidence against Defendant. The court further found that the testimony was highly prejudicial to Defendant. The State

has failed to show how the trial court abused its sound discretion in making those determinations. Therefore, I find that the mistrial in this matter should not be disturbed.

Accordingly, I would deny the writ application.

MEJ

SUSAN M. CHEHARDY
CHIEF JUDGE

FREDERICKA H. WICKER
JUDE G. GRAVOIS
MARC E. JOHNSON
STEPHEN J. WINDHORST
JOHN J. MOLAISSON, JR.
SCOTT U. SCHLEGEL
TIMOTHY S. MARCEL

JUDGES



FIFTH CIRCUIT
101 DERBIGNY STREET (70053)
POST OFFICE BOX 489
GRETNA, LOUISIANA 70054
www.fifthcircuit.org

CURTIS B. PURSELL
CLERK OF COURT

SUSAN S. BUCHHOLZ
CHIEF DEPUTY CLERK

LINDA M. TRAN
FIRST DEPUTY CLERK

MELISSA C. LEDET
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL STAFF

(504) 376-1400
(504) 376-1498 FAX

NOTICE OF DISPOSITION CERTIFICATE OF DELIVERY

I CERTIFY THAT A COPY OF THE DISPOSITION IN THE FOREGOING MATTER HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH **UNIFORM RULES - COURT OF APPEAL, RULE 4-6** THIS DAY **10/01/2026** TO THE TRIAL JUDGE, THE TRIAL COURT CLERK OF COURT, AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE COUNSEL OF RECORD FOR EACH PARTY, AND TO EACH PARTY NOT REPRESENTED BY COUNSEL, AS LISTED BELOW:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Curtis B. Pursell", is written over a horizontal line.

CURTIS B. PURSELL
CLERK OF COURT

26-K-461

E-NOTIFIED

40th District Court (Clerk)
Honorable Nghana Lewis (DISTRICT JUDGE)
Eusi H. Phillips (Relator)

Bridget A. Dinvaut (Relator)
Brady Skinner, III (Respondent)

MAILED