COURT OF APPEALS OF VIRGINIA

Record No. 1054-25-4

ISAAC DEVON FULTS
v.
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

Present: Chief Judge Decker, Judges AtLee and Callins

Argued at Fredericksburg, Virginia

Opinion Issued September 22, 2026*

FROM THE CIRCUIT COURT OF FAUQUIER COUNTY
Douglas L. Fleming, Jr., Judge

Jenna Catherine Mueller, Assistant Public Defender, for appellant.

Lauren C. Campbell, Assistant Attorney General (Jason S. Miyares,[1] Attorney General, on brief), for appellee.

MEMORANDUM OPINION BY
JUDGE RICHARD Y. ATLEE, JR.

After the trial court denied his motion to suppress the evidence, Isaac Devon Fults entered a conditional plea of guilty to driving after illegally consuming alcohol. On appeal, Fults argues that the trial court erred in finding that the traffic stop of his vehicle was not an unreasonable seizure under the Fourth Amendment. For the following reasons, we affirm.

* This opinion is not designated for publication. *See* Code § 17.1-413(A).

[1] Jay C. Jones succeeded Jason S. Miyares as Attorney General on January 17, 2026.

BACKGROUND

"In reviewing the denial of a motion to suppress, we 'consider the facts in the light most favorable to the Commonwealth, the prevailing party at trial.'" *Aponte v. Commonwealth*, 68 Va. App. 146, 156 (2017) (quoting *Hairston v. Commonwealth*, 67 Va. App. 552, 560 (2017)).

On April 26, 2024, Fauquier County Sheriff's Deputy Cole Masterson assisted another officer with a traffic stop at the intersection of Station Drive and Marsh Road. While he was assisting with the stop, Masterson observed the traffic light turn yellow for "about four and a half [or] five seconds," before he saw a Nissan sedan pass through the intersection as the light turned red.

Masterson then initiated a traffic stop of the Nissan, which was driven by Fults. Fults handed the deputy his identification, indicating he was under the age of 21. Masterson observed signs of alcohol impairment and, after conducting several field sobriety tests, arrested Fults for driving after illegally consuming alcohol.

In the trial court, Fults moved to suppress the evidence, arguing that the deputy did not have reasonable articulable suspicion of criminal activity to justify the traffic stop. At a hearing on the motion, Masterson testified that only the two front tires of Fults's vehicle had crossed the solid white line at the intersection when the traffic light turned red. He also stated that he did not observe Fults commit any other traffic violation.

The Commonwealth introduced the deputy's dash camera footage. The video showed that the traffic light was initially green, then changed to yellow. The light remained yellow for four to five seconds and then turned red. Fults's vehicle passed through the intersection in the same moment the light changed from yellow to red.

The Commonwealth argued that Masterson stopped Fults for a suspected violation of Code § 46.2-833(A), which mandates how traffic must follow the signals of traffic lights. Fults

argued that his conduct was not prohibited under the statute because he "had already entered the intersection and was entitled, based on the Virginia law, to continue moving through the intersection." In denying the motion, the trial court emphasized that the statute was not intended to allow drivers to "speed up fast enough to get [their] front tires into the intersection." The court found that, based on the video, it was not "reasonably safe" for Fults to have proceeded through the intersection. Accordingly, the trial court found that Deputy Masterson had reasonable articulable suspicion to stop Fults for the traffic violation.

Fults subsequently entered into a conditional plea agreement wherein he reserved his right to appeal the denial of his motion to suppress. At a subsequent hearing, the trial court accepted Fults's plea and found him guilty of driving after illegally consuming alcohol. This appeal followed.

ANALYSIS

"On review of the trial court's denial of a motion to suppress, an 'appellant bears the burden of establishing that reversible error occurred.'" *Moreno v. Commonwealth*, 73 Va. App. 267, 274 (2021) (quoting *Williams v. Commonwealth*, 71 Va. App. 462, 474 (2020)). In conducting our review, we are "bound by the trial court's factual findings unless those findings are plainly wrong or unsupported by the evidence," however, we "review the trial court's application of the law de novo." *Malbrough v. Commonwealth*, 275 Va. 163, 168-69 (2008).

"The Fourth Amendment protects people from unreasonable searches and seizures." *Williams*, 71 Va. App. at 476. "[A] traffic stop for a suspected violation of law is a 'seizure' of the occupants of the vehicle and therefore must be conducted in accordance with the Fourth Amendment." *Joyce v. Commonwealth*, 72 Va. App. 9, 14 (2020) (alteration in original) (quoting *Mason v. Commonwealth*, 291 Va. 362, 367-68 (2016)). "An officer may effect a traffic stop when he has reasonable suspicion to believe a traffic or equipment violation has

occurred." *McCain v. Commonwealth*, 275 Va. 546, 553 (2008). Although there is no "bright line" rule, an officer's reasonable suspicion is justified if at the time of the stop the officer had "a particularized and objective basis for suspecting the particular person stopped." *Mitchell v. Commonwealth*, 73 Va. App. 234, 246 (2021) (quoting *Heien v. North Carolina*, 574 U.S. 54, 60 (2014)). "Reasonable suspicion 'is more than a "mere hunch" but less than "proof of wrongdoing by a preponderance of the evidence."'" *Joyce*, 72 Va. App. at 14 (quoting *Commonwealth v. Thomas*, 23 Va. App. 598, 610-11 (1996)). Thus, an officer needs "only 'some minimal level of objective justification' for making" a traffic stop. *Mitchell*, 73 Va. App. at 247 (quoting *Bland v. Commonwealth*, 66 Va. App. 405, 413 (2016)).

"The possibility that an officer ultimately may prove to be mistaken or that there may be an innocent explanation for the facts giving rise to the officer's suspicion does not negate, in and of itself, the officer's reasonable, articulable suspicion." *Id.* (quoting *Shifflett v. Commonwealth*, 58 Va. App. 732, 736 (2011)); *see also Joyce*, 72 Va. App. at 16 (discussing a driver's "prolonged stop[] at a green light" may or may not violate Code § 46.2-833, but that ipso facto does not negate the reasonableness of an officer's suspicion). At bottom, the totality of the circumstances viewed "through the eyes of a reasonable police officer with the knowledge, training, and experience of the investigating officer" must show that the officer made a "fair inference" of suspicion to justify the traffic stop. *Logan v. Commonwealth*, 19 Va. App. 437, 441-42 (1994) (emphasis omitted) (quoting *Murphy v. Commonwealth*, 9 Va. App. 139, 144 (1989)).

Deputy Masterson stopped Fults for a suspected violation of Code § 46.2-833(A), which states in relevant part that:

> [s]teady amber indicates that a change is about to be made in the direction of the moving of traffic. When the amber signal is shown, traffic which has not already entered the intersection, including the crosswalks, shall stop if it is not reasonably safe to

> continue, but traffic which has already entered the intersection shall continue to move until the intersection has been cleared.

Fults maintains that his conduct did not violate the statute. He argues that the "plain language" of the statute permits traffic to enter and proceed through the intersection while the amber signal is shown. Thus, according to Fults, the deputy did not have the requisite reasonable suspicion that Fults committed a traffic violation and the stop was conducted in violation of his Fourth Amendment rights.

Fults's argument ignores the standard by which an officer's initial traffic stop is justified. The question is whether, on the totality of the circumstances, the officer had "some minimal level of objective justification" for making the traffic stop. *Mitchell*, 73 Va. App. at 247. And the record here amply supports Deputy Masterson's reasonable suspicion that Fults violated the statute. The undisputed facts were that Masterson observed the light change from green to yellow and remain yellow for four or five seconds *before* Fults entered the intersection. As Fults's two front tires crossed the solid white line, the light turned red.

Code § 46.2-833(A) states that "[w]hen the amber signal is shown, traffic which has not already entered the intersection . . . shall stop if it is not reasonably safe to continue." Determining whether it was reasonably safe or unsafe for a driver to continue past an amber light might require an officer to conduct an investigatory stop. As we explained in *Joyce*, a driver's ultimate "innocent explanation" of his behavior does not negate the reasonableness of an officer's suspicion to conduct an investigatory stop. 72 Va. App. at 14 (quoting *Shifflett*, 58 Va. App. at 736).

Moreover, the trial court, after hearing evidence and watching the dash camera footage, made a finding that it was not reasonably safe for Fults to proceed through the traffic light. We must defer to the trial court's factual finding. *See Malbrough*, 275 Va. at 168; *see also Barney v. Commonwealth*, 302 Va. 84, 97 (2023) (recognizing the appellate court's duty to defer to "the

factfinder's 'interpretation of all of the evidence, including video evidence[,]' presented at trial" (quoting *Meade v. Commonwealth*, 74 Va. App. 796, 806 (2022))). Upon his observations of the movement of Fults's vehicle at the intersection, the deputy had reasonable articulable suspicion that Fults violated Code § 46.2-833(A). Accordingly, the seizure of his vehicle was not unreasonable, and the trial court did not err in denying his motion to suppress.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, we affirm the trial court's judgment.

Affirmed.