

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE  
EIGHTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND  
FOR ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA

STATE OF FLORIDA,

CASE NO. 01-2025-CF-002653-A  
APPEAL NO. 1D26-0504

Plaintiff,

vs.

**TRANSCRIPT ON APPEAL**

ZION MOTHEUS WARD,

Defendant.

\_\_\_\_\_/

Proceedings: Judgment & Sentence

Before: THE HONORABLE ROBERT K. GROEB  
Circuit Judge

Date: February 16, 2026

Place: Judge Stephan P. Mickle, Sr. Criminal Courthouse  
Gainesville, Florida

Reporter: Stephanie B. Lanier, RPR,  
Registered Professional Reporter  
Eighth Judicial Circuit

APPEARANCES:

THE HONORABLE BRIAN S. KRAMER, STATE ATTORNEY  
Eighth Judicial Circuit of Florida  
LUA JOY MELLMAN LEPIANKA, ASSISTANT STATE ATTORNEY  
120 West University Avenue  
Gainesville, Florida 32601  
Attorneys for the State of Florida

PIERRE-ANTOINE LAW, PA  
YVENS A. PIERRE-ANTOINE, ATTORNEY AT LAW  
305 Northeast 1st Street  
Gainesville, Florida 32601-5310  
Attorneys for the Defendant

P R O C E E D I N G S

(February 16, 2026, 9:12 AM.)

MS. RAMIREZ: Set for a change of plea. In custody Zion Ward, 2024-CF-2994-A and 2025-CF-2653-A.

Ms. Lepianka for the State. Mr. Pierre-Antoine for the defense. Zion Ward.

MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Your Honor, while Mr. Ward is approaching, would it be possible for the State and I to approach?

THE COURT: I'm sorry?

MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: While Mr. Ward is coming out, can the State and I approach?

THE COURT: Sure. Sure.

(Begin sidebar.)

MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Good morning, Judge.

MS. LEPIANKA: Do you want to take a look?

I know my judge; he's going to want to see the score sheet.

THE COURT: It's all about the score sheet.

MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: It's all about consistency; right?

MS. LEPIANKA: I just know I'm going to have to go back if I don't do it first.

THE COURT: This is like a phone book.

MS. LEPIANKA: Because there are two cases.

1 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Yeah. Judge, this is a case out  
2 of a VOP, the new charge. The new charge violated his  
3 probation.

4 The one thing -- the State actually asked for a year  
5 and a week for both cases. What we're proposing, Judge,  
6 is Mr. Ward is -- was a victim of a shooting in  
7 Tallahassee, and he cooperated. He is extremely paranoid.  
8 And what we've been trying to do is sentence a consecutive  
9 nine months of jail sentence; so he'll be, in essence,  
10 serving 18 months. He'll be getting less time credit.  
11 You know, the prison system gives them more -- they're  
12 more -- they're both with regards to credit time served --

13 THE COURT: (Indiscernible.)

14 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: And so he's actually going to be  
15 spending a lot more time. He's going to work on his GED  
16 and get his life together. So we're going to be asking if  
17 the Court wouldn't mind sentencing him to two nine-month  
18 consecutive terms.

19 THE COURT: I really don't like to do that.

20 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: It's an unusual circumstance,  
21 Judge, but we typically don't ask that, but in this  
22 situation, when you've been a victim, trauma from a  
23 shooting and he cooperated, and he is -- you know, he  
24 is -- I've never been shot at before.

25 THE COURT: I have.

1 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Oh.

2 THE COURT: It's no fun.

3 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: It's not fun. So it's very  
4 traumatic. I mean, he's really petrified. And this guy  
5 is not a street guy. He's really more or less been  
6 spoiled, if anything.

7 THE COURT: So he's got -- what he's on probation for  
8 is this written threat to kill?

9 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Yes.

10 THE COURT: Second-degree felony.

11 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: No, he was on probation on  
12 battery.

13 THE COURT: A battery.

14 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: And what happened --

15 THE COURT: This is the new charge?

16 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: It's a new charge. It's the  
17 same girl. They go back and forth. And he made some  
18 texts that were inappropriate. He was living in Orlando  
19 when that happened, and she's living here.

20 THE COURT: I just don't like consecutive jail  
21 sentences. He scores permissibly DOC. I also  
22 (indiscernible). Basically, they get to RMC and they  
23 don't go any further; they let them out.

24 MS. LEPIANKA: I think it depends on how much credit  
25 he has for time served. If he's only got, you know, ten

1 days' credit time served, he's going to go to an actual  
2 DOC facility.

3 THE COURT: That's not what I'm hearing. So the  
4 administrators I've talked to over there at RMC say most  
5 of the sentences that are less than 18 months, they're  
6 going to keep them in RMC; they're not going to ship them  
7 anywhere, and they don't let them go. So that's why I  
8 usually bottom it out at 18 months.

9 MS. LEPIANKA: My understanding was that if they're  
10 going -- if they've got another three months or less, they  
11 generally keep them there. But if it's longer than that,  
12 because of lack of credit, then they do tend to get  
13 shipped off, but I don't know.

14 THE COURT: I'm confident with the people that I  
15 talked to over there. So I don't think I'd be inclined to  
16 do that.

17 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: What would the Court be inclined  
18 to do?

19 THE COURT: Are you-all inviting me in?

20 MS. LEPIANKA: Yes.

21 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Yes.

22 THE COURT: Eighteen months. That's what I would be  
23 willing to do.

24 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Okay. Let me -- can I --

25 THE COURT: Yeah. I'll want to give you this back.

1 (End of sidebar.)

2 (Pause in Proceedings.)

3 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Your Honor,  
4 Yvens Pierre-Antoine, representing Mr. Ward.

5 Your Honor, I've informed Mr. Ward that we did invite  
6 the Court to indicate what the Court would be inclined to  
7 do, the State and I. And the Court indicated 18 months.

8 And Mr. Ward would take a quick opportunity to  
9 address the Court and --

10 What do you want to tell the judge?

11 THE COURT: Yes, sir.

12 THE DEFENDANT: I just want to speak to you, Judge.  
13 I just want to let you know the type of person I am. I'm  
14 not a violent person. I never been a violent person. I  
15 never had an extensive record or anything like that.

16 And I take care of a son. And I just want to try to  
17 see if I can ask you -- I understand the things that I've  
18 done, and I completely take the fault for that. But I  
19 just -- I just wanted to try to see if I can talk to you  
20 to try to get the initial plea for the nine and nine  
21 consecutive for the 18-month county time.

22 I understand that Mr. Pierre said that you may not  
23 accept that, but I just want to speak out in my voice and  
24 just let you know that I'm not a violent person.

25 And, actually, I have been going on, like, a job and

1 stuff like that.

2 And I don't live in Gainesville. I reside in  
3 Orlando.

4 I just want to get this over with. I was just trying  
5 to prevent from going to prison.

6 THE COURT: And, you know, the first words out of  
7 Mr. Pierre-Antoine's mouth when he came up to the bench  
8 was "My client is not the typical guy that you see. He's  
9 not a violent guy." So he told me the same thing --

10 THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

11 THE COURT: -- to preface the conversation.

12 But here's the way that I look at it, Mr. Ward, and  
13 you might disagree with it. But it's always been my  
14 philosophy that you've got two crimes here that involve  
15 violence or threats of violence. You got probation --

16 THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

17 THE COURT: -- for one; so you had an opportunity for  
18 probation. Then you violated the probation by committing  
19 the new crime involving threats of violence. So I can't  
20 see my way clear -- I can't put you -- I'm not going to  
21 put you back on probation. I'm not going to put you in  
22 the county jail, because I've given you a chance on  
23 probation that you did not take advantage of. I feel  
24 compelled to send you to prison if you plea in front of  
25 me. Okay? So that's my reason on it. I understand what

1           you're saying, but I guess we just have a different frame  
2           of reference here as to how this is being looked at.

3           So 18 months is the best that I'm going to be able to  
4           offer to you. If it's something that you're not  
5           interested in, then we'll set your VOP case for a hearing.

6           (Pause in Proceedings.)

7           MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Your Honor, I believe we're  
8           going to enter a plea.

9           THE COURT: All right.

10          Mr. Ward, can I have you raise your right hand, sir,  
11          if you would, please.

12          (Defendant sworn.)

13          THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

14          THE COURT: All right. Mr. Pierre-Antoine?

15          MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Yes.

16          Mr. Ward, I have two sets of six-page documents. We  
17          went over the rights you're giving up by changing your  
18          plea to no contest today? We went over those rights; is  
19          that correct?

20          THE DEFENDANT: Yeah.

21          MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: You've got to speak up.

22          THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

23          THE COURT: You have to answer out loud, Mr. Ward --

24          THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

25          THE COURT: -- because we're making a record.

1 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: We tried to resolve this  
2 particular case with a year and a week, and we also made  
3 an attempt to try to resolve the case with nine months'  
4 consecutive sentence based on the things that we talked  
5 about at the Alachua County jail. Is that correct?

6 THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

7 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: And you score discretionary,  
8 meaning that the Court can sentence you what the Court  
9 deems to be fair in this case. And what the Court  
10 indicates it would do, after being invited into  
11 negotiation, is 18 months' Department of Corrections. Is  
12 that correct? Yes?

13 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

14 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: I'm not asking if you're happy  
15 with the resolution; I'm just asking you you are aware  
16 that the Court will sentence you to 18 months. Is that  
17 correct? Yes?

18 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

19 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: You're facing a second-degree  
20 felony, or you're facing -- you're facing 15 years and a  
21 \$10,000 fine. Is that correct? Second-degree felony.

22 THE DEFENDANT: I thought it was a third-degree  
23 degree, but yes.

24 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Yeah. Is that correct?

25 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

1 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: And so based on my advice, I've  
2 told you that this is in your best interest. Is that  
3 correct?

4 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

5 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: All right. I need for you to  
6 sign this. And I need for you to sign this one right  
7 here. Please sign it.

8 We talked about the rights you're giving up for the  
9 violation of probation. You're giving up the right to  
10 require the State to prove the case before the Court  
11 without a jury. And we also -- you're also giving up the  
12 right to require the State to prove the new charge beyond  
13 a reasonable doubt in front of a jury. Is that correct?

14 THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

15 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: You're giving up the right to  
16 cross-examine and bring forth any witnesses to testify in  
17 your behalf. Is that correct? Yes? Yes?

18 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

19 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: We went over the immigration  
20 warning, meaning if you're not a U.S. citizen, that this  
21 may lead to a deportation. My understanding is that you  
22 are a U.S. citizen. Is that correct?

23 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

24 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: We also went over the Jimmy Ryce  
25 warning, and you don't have any prior history involving

1 sexual offenses. Is that correct?

2 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

3 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: And so the Jimmy Ryce would not  
4 apply to you. Is that correct? Yes?

5 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

6 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: You're not taking any medication  
7 that may affect your ability to make decisions this  
8 morning. You're of sound mind. Is that correct?

9 Your mind is clear; is that correct?

10 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

11 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: And we went over the discovery.  
12 We've talked to numerous witnesses, from your apartment  
13 manager to your employer in Orlando to your batterers'  
14 intervention counselor, et cetera, and we went over all  
15 that. Is that correct? Yes?

16 THE DEFENDANT: Yes.

17 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: And based on the representation  
18 of the Court and the meeting that we had with the state  
19 attorney, and this -- this seems to be the best option  
20 available to you at the moment. Is that correct?

21 You're not happy about it; right? But this is -- out  
22 of the options available, this is the best one available  
23 to you. Is that correct?

24 THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

25 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: All right.

1           Your Honor, I tender the plea as being freely and  
2           knowingly made.

3           THE COURT: Thank you, Mr. Pierre-Antoine.

4           MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: We'll stipulate to a factual  
5           basis for the purposes of sentencing.

6           THE COURT: Thank you.

7           I'm going to make a finding for the record based upon  
8           the plea colloquy that has occurred in my -- I'm sorry?

9           MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: One moment, Your Honor.

10          THE COURT: Sure. Sure.

11          (Pause in Proceedings.)

12          MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Your Honor, before you impart  
13          sentence, his mother would like to address the Court as  
14          well.

15          THE COURT: Sure. I'd be happy to hear from her.

16          Ma'am, if you'd like to come up to this podium here.

17          MS. McBRIDE: Yes, sir.

18          THE COURT: Good morning. Can I get your name for  
19          the record, ma'am.

20          MS. McBRIDE: My name is Dana McBride. I am the  
21          mother of Zion Ward.

22          My son is not a bad person at all. I have witnessed  
23          the victim when all that this happened. Me and my  
24          ex-husband witnessed her coming to his apartment, jumping  
25          on my son, and everything. She's made a mockery of this

1 case by saying that she was pregnant. She's never been  
2 pregnant and never lost any twins or anything. I've asked  
3 if we could have her to show records where she went.

4 I've presented to his lawyer a video where the  
5 victim, the so-called victim, went to my son's apartment  
6 with a gun, and it's on video. You can hear her on there.

7 And there's several of the tenants there -- he got  
8 put out of his place in Gainesville because she kept  
9 coming to the property. He did the necessary steps to get  
10 away from her. He asked for a transfer.

11 I understand. I don't just blame him. I blame both  
12 of them. If my son has to serve charges, so should she.  
13 We presented police records where there are numerous  
14 calls, her vandalizing his car, vandalizing the apartment.  
15 I went extra to get all this information.

16 And on top of that, I have a non-profit organization  
17 that I help homeless and battered individuals, as well as  
18 reentry.

19 And I do this because we have lived through trauma.  
20 My son is a victim of three-time attempted murder in  
21 Tallahassee. They tried to kill him three times in one  
22 year. The State of Florida -- the State victim advocate  
23 moved us from Leon County to Santa Rosa County, where I  
24 became a victim myself and had to go through things, where  
25 people tried to kill me.

1           We have been through a lot, and my -- I have been  
2 mother and the father to him. On one of his birthdays,  
3 his father decided to sign over his rights, say he didn't  
4 want it; so I've been the sole provider. And my son know  
5 how I feel about him putting his hands on a female.

6           I'm not asking the judge for much. Judge, I'm not.  
7 But my son -- I understand it was wrong of him to make  
8 that threat; but, at the same time, she did not present  
9 the whole entire text message.

10           That young lady -- every time she talked to the state  
11 attorney, she called me. She even did a recording, and I  
12 sent that over, where she made a mockery, "Oh, I hope he  
13 get this amount of years."

14           And then on top of that, we have record where she has  
15 done this to three other men, young men, tried to say that  
16 they assaulted her. And the State should know this  
17 because the records are there.

18           But I'm asking -- I'm pleading for you, Judge, if you  
19 would. The ones that tried to kill my son -- they're in  
20 prison right now. And that puts him at risk. And I'm  
21 scared because I don't want to lose my son. I understand  
22 he has to do some time, but he's not prison material.  
23 Trust that he's not that; he's not.

24           And if I -- I want him to be one of my -- one of my  
25 success story for reentry into it because I know how hard

1           it is when they incarcerated when they get out. They  
2           either coming out of bad -- been in a domestic violence,  
3           or they coming out from being locked up, and then they end  
4           up being homeless.

5           I'm a parent that care about that because I know how  
6           it feels to be a victim, to be a parent of a victim. But  
7           my son doesn't deserve 18 months; he doesn't. If he  
8           deserve 18 months, Ms. ██████████ deserve 18 months too.  
9           She should be standing trial for her lies and deceptions  
10          that she has done with the state attorney.

11          THE COURT: Was the victim ever charged with  
12          anything, Ms. Lepianka?

13          MS. LEPIANKA: Not in connection to these charges.

14          THE COURT: Okay.

15          It's up to the State to determine who gets charged --

16          MS. McBRIDE: I understand.

17          THE COURT: -- with crimes. That's not my -- that's  
18          not my role. So the only thing I can do is deal with  
19          cases that are brought in front of me by the state  
20          attorney.

21          MS. McBRIDE: Understood.

22          THE COURT: I don't get to decide who to charge or  
23          not charge; so that's something beyond my control.

24          MS. McBRIDE: I understand that, but I feel like a  
25          lot of evidence has not been reviewed: the videotapes, the

1 phone calls, the text message to me, the voice messages,  
2 and the complaints from the tenants and the landlord. All  
3 of that was presented and the police reports of this girl  
4 going to his property. And I've asked several times,  
5 "Anything you need me to do, I'll take time off." I  
6 left -- I moved from Alabama to be here to make sure my  
7 son gets through this, moved my business down to Orlando  
8 so I could be there for him, help him with his son.

9 I just ask the Court that you, Judge -- that you  
10 don't give him jail time. I don't know how else to ask  
11 the Court for mercy, but I can guarantee you you will not  
12 see my son in front of you ever again. I can -- I can --  
13 I will bring you records of him improving everything on  
14 my -- on my nonprofit. My sister here -- she's one of my  
15 case manager and program directors for our program.

16 I'm just asking you to show mercy on my son, Judge,  
17 if you would please, because we have definitely -- myself  
18 and his grandmother have presented as much evidence as  
19 possible, police reports, videos, voicemail, that I've  
20 been repeatedly told that it would not be useful, when you  
21 can hear Ms. Peterson demanding -- my son telling her to  
22 leave his apartment and she demanding -- you can hear on  
23 the video demanding, "Go get my gun. Go get my ammo,  
24 stupid." You can hear her.

25 Have the State receive that? the video? the

1 voicemails? the text message. I even forwarded over the  
2 voicemail she left me to the attorney.

3 I'm not putting down his attorney, but I feel like  
4 more evidence should have been presented so we wouldn't be  
5 at this point where he'll be going to prison. He  
6 doesn't -- he doesn't -- he's a good kid. He's been  
7 through a lot. We both have been through a lot.

8 THE COURT: Well, thank you, ma'am.

9 MS. McBRIDE: Thank you.

10 THE COURT: I'm going to make a finding for the  
11 record based upon the plea colloquy that has occurred in  
12 my presence on the record in open court that Mr. Ward's  
13 plea of no contest and admission to violating his  
14 probation are both freely, knowingly, and voluntarily  
15 made.

16 Accordingly, in Case No. 01-2024-CF-2994-A, as to the  
17 first-degree misdemeanor of battery, simple battery,  
18 domestic battery, violation of probation, I'm going to  
19 revoke that probation as unsuccessfully completed. I'm  
20 going to convert all of the unpaid financial obligations  
21 that were part of that probation to a civil lien or civil  
22 judgment against you, and I'm simply going to close out  
23 that case with a time-served disposition of 103 days.

24 As to the primary case, which is Case No.  
25 01-2025-CF-2653-A, as to the second-degree felony charge

1 of written threats to kill or do bodily harm, I'm going to  
2 adjudicate you guilty of that second-degree felony, sir.  
3 I'm going to sentence you to a period of 18 months in the  
4 Florida Department of Corrections. I'm going to give you  
5 credit for time served in the amount of 103 days.

6 I'm also going to impose \$376.75 in investigative  
7 costs, and I'm going to reduce that to a civil lien or  
8 judgment as well.

9 Are you privately retained in this case,  
10 Mr. Pierre-Antoine?

11 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Yes, Your Honor, I am.

12 THE COURT: So simply going to also impose the  
13 legislatively mandated court costs in this case. I'm also  
14 going to reduce those to a civil lien or judgment.

15 So when you're done with your incarcerative sentence,  
16 sir, there will be no probation to follow this; it will  
17 just be the incarceration sentence.

18 Do you have any questions for me, Mr. Ward?

19 THE DEFENDANT: I'd like to hug my mama.

20 THE COURT: I'm sorry?

21 THE DEFENDANT: Can I hug my mama?

22 THE COURT: Can't let you do that. You're in the  
23 custody of the sheriff; so for security reasons, I'd like  
24 to do that, but I can't; so --

25 THE DEFENDANT: I can just tell her I love her, then?

1 THE COURT: You can tell her you love her; that's  
2 fine.

3 THE DEFENDANT: I love y'all, man.

4 THE COURT: Just can't let you have any contact with  
5 her.

6 MS. McBRIDE: I love you.

7 THE DEFENDANT: I'm straight, though. I'm good.  
8 I'll be all right. I'm a man. I'm built to last. I'm  
9 good.

10 (The clerk speaks with the Court.)

11 THE COURT: That's right. Yeah, adjudication on that  
12 as well.

13 All right. You have 30 days from today's date to  
14 appeal the Judgment and Sentence of the Court. We're  
15 going to fingerprint you and then remand you to the  
16 Department of Corrections. Good luck to you, sir.

17 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: Your Honor, that would conclude  
18 my business. May I be excused?

19 THE COURT: Mr. Pierre-Antoine, have a nice day, sir.

20 MR. PIERRE-ANTOINE: You too.

21 (Proceedings adjourned at 9:36 AM.)  
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C E R T I F I C A T E


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STATE OF FLORIDA )

COUNTY OF LEVY )

I, STEPHANIE B. LANIER, Registered Professional Reporter,  
Florida Professional Reporter, hereby certify that I have  
transcribed the foregoing recorded proceedings, pages numbered  
2 through 19, to the best of my ability based on the quality of  
the recording.

Dated this 9th day of March, 2026.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephanie B. Lanier, RPR,  
Judicial Court Reporter  
Eighth Judicial Circuit