

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by
Minn. R. Civ. App. P. 136.01, subd. 1(c).*

**STATE OF MINNESOTA
IN COURT OF APPEALS
A24-0157**

State of Minnesota,
Respondent,

vs.

Faron James Beaulieu,
Appellant.

**Filed June 16, 2025
Affirmed
Schmidt, Judge**

Mille Lacs County District Court
File No. 48-CR-23-764

Keith Ellison, Attorney General, St. Paul, Minnesota; and

Corey J. Haller, Mille Lacs County Attorney, Henry D. Capuano, Assistant County Attorney, Milaca, Minnesota (for respondent)

Cathryn Middlebrook, Chief Appellate Public Defender, Jennifer Lauermann, Assistant Public Defender, St. Paul, Minnesota (for appellant)

Considered and decided by Schmidt, Presiding Judge; Connolly, Judge; and Smith, John, Judge.*

* Retired judge of the Minnesota Court of Appeals, serving by appointment pursuant to Minn. Const. art. VI, § 10.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

SCHMIDT, Judge

In this appeal from an order denying postconviction relief, appellant Faron James Beaulieu argues that the postconviction court erred by not allowing him to withdraw his guilty plea. Because the district court did not abuse its discretion in denying Beaulieu's petition for postconviction relief, we affirm.

FACTS

After Beaulieu and his partner had an argument, Beaulieu proceeded to intimidate her and slash the tires of their shared vehicle. Respondent State of Minnesota charged Beaulieu with one count of felony domestic assault.¹

Beaulieu pleaded guilty. At the hearing, his defense attorney questioned Beaulieu about his rights and the prosecutor asked Beaulieu about the facts of the offense. The district court accepted the plea and convicted him of one count of felony domestic assault.

Beaulieu appealed his conviction. He filed a motion to stay the appeal pending postconviction proceedings, which we granted. Beaulieu then filed a petition for postconviction relief, arguing that he should be allowed to withdraw his plea because it was not voluntary. After a hearing, the postconviction court denied the petition, and we dissolved the stay of the appeal.

¹ Beaulieu had a prior felony violation of an order for protection (OFP), a prior gross-misdemeanor OFP violation, and a prior misdemeanor domestic assault conviction in the two years preceding the current incident. Minn. Stat. § 609.2242, subd. 4 (2024) (stating a domestic assault is a felony when the defendant has two or more prior domestic assault convictions within the last ten years).

DECISION

Beaulieu argues that the postconviction court abused its discretion because his plea was not voluntary. We review the denial of a postconviction petition for an abuse of discretion. *State v. Whitson*, 876 N.W.2d 297, 303 (Minn. 2016).²

After sentencing, a defendant may withdraw a guilty plea only if “withdrawal is necessary to correct a manifest injustice.” Minn. R. Crim. P. 15.05, subd. 1. A manifest injustice occurs when a plea was not valid. *State v. Raleigh*, 778 N.W.2d 90, 94 (Minn. 2010). “To be constitutionally valid, a guilty plea must be accurate, voluntary, and intelligent.” *Id.*³ “The voluntariness requirement ensures a defendant is not pleading guilty due to improper pressure or coercion.” *Id.* at 96.

Beaulieu argues his plea was involuntary because “he felt forced into pleading guilty because he did not feel that [his] lawyer was prepared to proceed to trial.” Whether a plea is involuntary due to ineffective assistance of counsel “depends on whether counsel’s advice was within the range of competence demanded of attorneys in criminal cases.” *State v. Ecker*, 524 N.W.2d 712, 718 (Minn. 1994) (quotation omitted). Beaulieu must show (1) his “counsel’s representation fell below an objective standard of

² The validity of a guilty plea is a question of law that we review de novo. *Raleigh*, 778 N.W.2d at 94. But when all the issues raised on direct appeal were also raised and decided in the petition for postconviction relief, we apply the “standard of review applicable to an appeal from a denial of a petition for postconviction relief.” *Whitson*, 876 N.W.2d at 303.

³ Beaulieu did not challenge the accuracy or intelligence of his plea before the postconviction court. Beaulieu’s counseled brief on appeal also focuses solely on the voluntariness of the guilty plea.

reasonableness[.]” and (2) “counsel’s deficient performance” resulted in prejudice. *Id.* (citing *Strickland v. Washington*, 466 U.S. 668, 687-88 (1984)). To satisfy the second prong of this test, Beaulieu must show “that but for the alleged errors of his counsel, he would not have pleaded guilty.” *Id.*

Beaulieu argues his plea was involuntary because his trial attorney was unprepared and had not adequately represented him. But at the plea hearing, Beaulieu’s attorney asked: “just checking back in with you to make sure you want to do this. Is that accurate?” To which Beaulieu responded in the affirmative. Beaulieu also waived his other rights and confirmed that he did not feel pressure to plead guilty.

In arguing for reversal, Beaulieu cites only his own affidavit and testimony. But the postconviction court rejected this evidence as “conclusory statements[.]” The court noted that Beaulieu gave “no further information about why he feels misrepresented or why he felt pressured to plead guilty.” The postconviction court noted Beaulieu provided no “particular statements made to him by counsel” that would demonstrate misrepresentation or pressure to plead guilty, which left the court “without a basis to substantiate those conclusory statements or evaluate their veracity.” In short, the postconviction court determined that Beaulieu did not prove that withdrawal was necessary to prevent a manifest injustice. Minn. R. Crim. P. 15.05, subd. 1.

Based upon the record that Beaulieu provided in support of his postconviction petition, we agree with the postconviction court that Beaulieu neither established that his counsel’s behavior fell below an objective standard of reasonableness, nor established that

he would not have pleaded guilty but for his counsel's alleged errors. *Ecker*, 524 N.W.2d at 718. The court did not abuse its discretion in denying Beaulieu's postconviction petition.

In his pro se supplemental brief, Beaulieu appears to argue that he did not commit the underlying offense. To the extent that we construe the pro se brief as a challenge to the accuracy of the guilty plea, we determine that the plea hearing transcript demonstrates that Beaulieu's plea was accurate. Beaulieu admitted to each element of the offense and the plea colloquy established a sufficient factual basis. *Raleigh*, 778 N.W.2d at 94 ("To be accurate, a plea must be established on a proper factual basis."). Beaulieu has not demonstrated any deficiencies in the factual basis such that "withdrawal is necessary to correct a manifest injustice." Minn. R. Crim. P. 15.05, subd. 1.

Affirmed.