

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by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
A25-0833**

Tyler Allan Cronquist, petitioner,
Appellant,

vs.

State of Minnesota,
Respondent.

**Filed March 2, 2026
Reversed and remanded
Cochran, Judge**

Crow Wing County District Court
File No. 18-CR-15-66

Cathryn Middlebrook, Chief Appellate Public Defender, Kathryn J. Lockwood, Assistant Appellate Public Defender, St. Paul, Minnesota (for appellant)

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

Kelsey Hopps, Crow Wing County Attorney, Brainerd, Minnesota; and

Travis J. Smith, Special Assistant County Attorney, Slayton, Minnesota (for respondent)

Considered and decided by Cochran, Presiding Judge; Bratvold, Judge; and Schmidt, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

COCHRAN, Judge

On appeal from summary denial of a petition for postconviction relief, appellant argues that the postconviction court abused its discretion when it made adverse credibility determinations as part of its decision to deny the petition without holding an evidentiary hearing. Because we conclude that the postconviction court abused its discretion when it made improper credibility determinations to support the summary denial of the petition, we reverse and remand for the postconviction court to reconsider the petition applying the proper standard.

FACTS

The Underlying Charges and Plea Deal

On January 6, 2015, respondent State of Minnesota charged appellant Tyler Allan Cronquist with several crimes following the shooting of two individuals. The charges included: two counts of second-degree murder in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 609.19, subdivision 1(1) (2014); one count of first-degree assault involving great bodily harm in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 609.221, subdivision 1 (2014); and one count of second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 609.222, subdivision 1 (2014).

The complaint alleged the following facts in support of the charges. Two days before the complaint was filed, Cronquist and Nathan Becker were at C.C.'s apartment with her. After their arrival, another individual J.K. came to the apartment. When J.K. walked into the apartment, Cronquist and Becker began "staring [J.K.] down while all four

were in the living room.” C.C. then went to the kitchen. While in the kitchen, she heard a “loud noise” and saw J.K. on the floor in the living room. The complaint further alleged that Cronquist then walked up to C.C. “and shot her in the head.” At that point, both Cronquist and Becker left the apartment. C.C. then called 911 and reported the shooting.

When law enforcement arrived, C.C. was still conscious and bleeding from her head, but J.K. was unconscious and gasping for air. C.C. told the officers that Cronquist had shot her. Both C.C. and J.K. were transported by ambulance to a medical center before being airlifted to a hospital, where J.K. died from the gunshot injury. C.C. survived. Police arrested Becker, and Cronquist later turned himself in to local law enforcement.

After the state filed its criminal complaint against Cronquist, a grand jury indicted Cronquist on one count of premeditated first-degree murder in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 609.185, subdivision (a)(1) (2014); and one count of attempted premeditated first-degree murder in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 609.185, subdivision (a)(1), with reference to section 609.17, subdivision 1 (2014). Following the indictment, the previously filed complaint against Cronquist was dismissed.

Becker was also charged in relation to the shooting. The state charged Becker with aiding and abetting Cronquist in the shootings of J.K. and C.C.

Becker’s trial occurred before the scheduled start of Cronquist’s trial. At Becker’s trial, C.C. testified that Cronquist shot both her and J.K. Neither Cronquist nor Becker testified at Becker’s trial. Becker’s attorney argued that Cronquist alone was responsible. Becker was found not guilty on all charges.

In September 2016, following Becker's acquittal, Cronquist entered into a plea agreement with the state. He pleaded guilty to one count of second-degree murder and one count of attempted second-degree murder. In exchange for Cronquist's guilty pleas, the state dismissed the premeditated first-degree murder and attempted premeditated first-degree murder charges. The district court sentenced Cronquist to consecutive sentences of 306 months' imprisonment for second-degree murder and 153 months' imprisonment for attempted second-degree murder, for a total consecutive sentence of 459 months.

Postconviction Proceedings

On September 14, 2023, approximately seven years after Cronquist pleaded guilty, Becker informed a deputy at the Crow Wing County Jail that he "wished to confess to a murder he had committed." Becker was in jail for unrelated reasons. Becker then gave a recorded statement. In his statement, Becker told the sheriff's deputy that he shot C.C. and J.K. on January 4, 2015, in C.C.'s home with a .45-caliber semi-automatic pistol. Becker stated that, before the shootings, he and Cronquist went into the bathroom, where he produced the pistol from his pants. Becker further stated that Cronquist told him "not to do it," but Becker went back into the living room and he shot J.K. According to his statement, he then went into the kitchen and shot C.C. Becker did not divulge his motivations for the shootings, but claimed "God compelled him to confess." Becker's statement was forwarded to the public defender's office, who informed Cronquist of the statement.

On February 5, 2025, Cronquist petitioned for postconviction relief pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 590.01 (2024), requesting leave to withdraw his guilty pleas to second-degree murder and attempted second-degree murder. Cronquist also requested an evidentiary hearing to prove that Becker's confession exonerates Cronquist and therefore Cronquist's guilty pleas are invalid.

In his petition, Cronquist alleged the following facts in support of withdrawal of his guilty pleas. On the day of the shootings, Cronquist was at C.C.'s apartment with Becker, C.C., and J.K. While he was there, a conflict broke out between Becker and J.K.—Cronquist was not involved. Becker then went into the bathroom with Cronquist, and showed Cronquist that he had a gun. When Cronquist saw the gun, he made Becker promise not to shoot anyone. Cronquist left the bathroom, went into the kitchen, and called his friend, D.D., for a ride home. While Cronquist was on the phone with D.D., Becker shot J.K. Cronquist heard the gunshot and looked up to see Becker coming towards him with the gun. Cronquist tried to run out of the door of the apartment, but Becker stopped him and would not let him leave. Becker then shot C.C. in the face, at which point Cronquist escaped. Cronquist explained that he ran away because he was afraid that Becker would shoot him.

Along with his petition, Cronquist filed the sheriff's deputy's report of Becker's confession at the county jail. Cronquist also filed an affidavit from D.D. and an affidavit from Cronquist himself. The affidavit of D.D. states that he and Cronquist lived together in January 2015. D.D.'s affidavit also states that Cronquist called D.D. for a ride home on January 4, 2015 (the day of the shooting), and while he and Cronquist were talking, D.D.

heard what sounded like gunshots in the background. According to D.D., Cronquist was mid-sentence, when D.D. heard the noise.

In Cronquist's affidavit, Cronquist attested to the version of events outlined in his petition. Cronquist further explained that he did not know that Becker had a gun or intended to shoot anyone until Becker showed him a gun while they were in the bathroom at C.C.'s home. Cronquist also stated that he never talked to police or testified against Becker because he was afraid of Becker, though he insisted that he told his attorneys that Becker shot C.C. and J.K. He further explained that his attorneys told him he was likely to go to prison regardless, and urged him to testify against Becker, which he refused out of fear. Cronquist also stated that once Becker was acquitted, Cronquist's attorneys told him he would likely spend the rest of his life in prison unless Cronquist pleaded guilty. Based on these allegations, Cronquist requested an evidentiary hearing to prove Becker's confession exonerates him and his guilty pleas are not valid.

In his petition, Cronquist acknowledged that the petition was being filed more than two years after his conviction and sentencing but alleged that the petition meets two exceptions to the two-year time bar: the newly-discovered-evidence exception and the interests-of-justice exception. The state filed an answer to the petition, asking that the petition be dismissed without a hearing as time-barred and arguing that neither exception applies.

The postconviction court summarily denied Cronquist's petition without a hearing. The court concluded that the petition was time-barred under Minnesota Statutes section 590.01, subdivision 4, because more than two years had elapsed since the entry of final

judgment. The court further concluded that the newly-discovered-evidence exception to the time bar did not apply because “Becker’s purported confession is not newly-discovered evidence.” (quotation marks omitted). The postconviction court also concluded that the interests-of-justice exception did not apply. In denying Cronquist’s petition, the postconviction court expressly weighed the credibility of Becker’s confession and D.D.’s affidavit. It reasoned that “Becker’s purported confession, even if coupled by the new Affidavit of witness [D.D.], does not meet the trustworthy requirement that is needed in order to advance to further proceedings in this matter.” It went on to find that “Becker’s purported confession is not corroborated by a single shred of trustworthy independent evidence.” And the postconviction court concluded that Cronquist was not entitled to an evidentiary hearing on his petition for postconviction relief because the “files and records of the proceeding herein conclusively show that [Cronquist] is not entitled to postconviction relief.”

Cronquist appeals.

DECISION

A person convicted of a crime may seek postconviction relief by filing a petition alleging that the conviction “violated the person’s rights under the Constitution or laws of the United States or of the state.” Minn. Stat. § 590.01, subd. 1(1). A postconviction petition must be filed within two years after “the entry of judgment of conviction or sentence if no direct appeal is filed” unless an exception applies. *Id.*, subd. 4(a)(1). Relevant to this appeal, section 590.01 provides an exception to the two-year time bar if: the petition alleges the existence of newly discovered evidence and certain conditions

are met, or “the petition is not frivolous and is in the interests of justice.” *Id.*, subd. 4(b)(2), (5). “Any petition invoking an exception . . . must be filed within two years of the date the claim arises.” *Id.*, subd. 4(c).

An evidentiary hearing on the petition must be promptly held “[u]nless the petition and the files and records of the proceeding conclusively show that the petitioner is entitled to no relief.” Minn. Stat. § 590.04, subd. 1 (2024). When determining whether the petitioner is entitled to an evidentiary hearing, the postconviction court is required to consider the facts alleged in the petition as true and construe them in the light most favorable to the petitioner. *Andersen v. State*, 913 N.W.2d 417, 422-23 (Minn. 2018). “[T]he burden is on a petitioner to show facts entitling the petitioner to relief.” *Allwine v. State*, 994 N.W.2d 528, 541 (Minn. 2023).

We review a postconviction court’s decision on a petition for postconviction relief for an abuse of discretion. *Andersen*, 913 N.W.2d at 422. “A postconviction court abuses its discretion when its decision is based on an erroneous view of the law or is against logic and the facts in the record.” *Brown v. State*, 895 N.W.2d 612, 617 (Minn. 2017) (quotation omitted). A postconviction court’s legal determinations are reviewed de novo, and its factual findings for clear error. *Id.*

Cronquist argues that the postconviction court abused its discretion when it made credibility determinations to support its conclusion that Cronquist’s petition was time-barred and no exception applied, without first holding an evidentiary hearing. We agree.

As discussed above, the postconviction court must “consider[] the facts alleged in the petition as true and construe[] them in the light most favorable to the petitioner” in deciding whether to hold an evidentiary hearing. *Andersen*, 913 N.W.2d at 422-23. A postconviction court may not assess an affiant’s credibility in determining whether a petitioner is entitled to a hearing. *Id.* at 423. Credibility determinations may be made only after an evidentiary hearing on a postconviction petition. *Id.* at 423-24.

In *Andersen*, the supreme court addressed an issue similar to the issue raised in this case. There, the postconviction court summarily concluded that Andersen’s petition for postconviction relief was untimely because the petition was filed after the two-year time bar and the allegations in the petition and supporting documents did not satisfy the newly-discovered-evidence exception. *Id.* at 422. In reaching this decision, the postconviction court determined that two supporting affidavits filed by the petitioner were “unreliable” and “dubious.” *Id.* The supreme court reversed the postconviction court’s summary denial and remanded, emphasizing that the supreme court has “repeatedly instructed postconviction courts that they may not find a postconviction affiant unreliable without first holding an evidentiary hearing to assess the affiant’s credibility.” *Id.* at 423.

Similar to *Andersen*, the postconviction court here denied Cronquist’s petition based on credibility determinations without first conducting an evidentiary hearing. The postconviction court’s order includes express credibility determinations, like those which the supreme court has “admoni[shed].” *Id.* Here, the postconviction court found that “Becker’s purported confession, even if coupled by the new Affidavit of witness [D.D.], does not meet the trustworthy requirement that is needed in order to advance to further

proceedings in this matter.” It went on to find that the affidavit of D.D. “has no veracity,” and further found that

it is troubling that Becker has made this confession at a time when he is protected by the prohibition of double jeopardy (and thus has nothing to lose by making the confession), and also at a time when all indications were that he was feeling hopeless in life (sitting in jail due to his longstanding meth addiction persisting).

Because the postconviction court made credibility determinations and did not accept the allegations in Cronquist’s petition and the supporting documents as true, we conclude the postconviction court abused its discretion when it summarily denied Cronquist’s petition.

To persuade us otherwise, the state argues that any credibility determinations made by the postconviction court do not require reversal because “the facts alleged in the petition . . . taken as true . . . are not legally [sufficient] to show that [Cronquist] meets either the newly-discovered-evidence or interests of justice exceptions” to the two-year time bar set forth in section 590.01. But the state does not explain why the facts alleged in the petition, taken as true, are insufficient to meet either of the statutory exceptions. And, as discussed above, the postconviction court did not make a determination that Cronquist’s factual allegations and supporting evidence, if true, did not entitle him to relief. Instead, the postconviction court’s denial of Cronquist’s petition relies on determinations about the credibility of Becker’s confession and D.D.’s statement in his affidavit. Relying on those credibility determinations, the postconviction court concluded that neither exception applied and summarily denied the petition.

Abuse of discretion is a deferential standard, but it is not absolute. *State v. Warren*, 592 N.W.2d 440, 451 (Minn. 1999). And it does not permit a postconviction court to make credibility determinations in deciding whether to grant an evidentiary hearing on a petition for postconviction relief. Instead, the postconviction court must consider the facts alleged in the postconviction petition as true and construe them in the light most favorable to the petitioner. *Andersen*, 913 N.W.2d at 422-23.

We therefore conclude that the postconviction court abused its discretion by impermissibly weighing the credibility of the facts alleged in Cronquist's petition and the supporting documents, without an evidentiary hearing, when it summarily denied Cronquist's postconviction petition. Accordingly, we reverse and remand to the postconviction court with specific instructions to: assume that the facts alleged in the petition and supporting documents are true; construe those facts in the light most favorable to Cronquist; and then assess whether, under section 590.04, subdivision 1, an evidentiary hearing is required. *See id.*

Reversed and remanded.