

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by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
A25-0840**

State of Minnesota,
Respondent,

vs.

Albert Joe Ryans, Jr.,
Appellant.

**Filed April 27, 2026
Affirmed
Johnson, Judge**

Hennepin County District Court
File No. 27-CR-24-15648

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

Mary F. Moriarty, Hennepin County Attorney, Matthew D. Hough, Assistant County Attorney, Minneapolis, Minnesota (for respondent)

Cathryn Middlebrook, Chief Appellate Public Defender, Julie L. Nelson, Assistant Public Defender, St. Paul, Minnesota (for appellant)

Considered and decided by Larson, Presiding Judge; Johnson, Judge; and Schmidt, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

JOHNSON, Judge

A Hennepin County jury found Albert Joe Ryans Jr. guilty of three crimes based on evidence that he possessed fentanyl and methamphetamine and unlawfully possessed a firearm. Ryans's convictions are based in part on evidence obtained in warrantless

searches of his person and a vehicle. Before trial, Ryans moved to suppress that evidence, and the district court denied the motion. We conclude that the district court did not err because police officers had probable cause to believe that Ryans had committed a crime before they seized him and conducted the challenged searches. Therefore, we affirm.

FACTS

On June 27, 2024, Minneapolis Police Department officers were patrolling the area around a homeless encampment near the intersection of East 28th Street and 14th Avenue South. The area had a history of shootings, drug use, and drug overdoses. One officer remotely monitored the area by watching a real-time videostream created by a surveillance camera that was located near the encampment. Other officers were in squad vehicles near the encampment.

At approximately noon, the remote officer communicated to other patrolling officers that she observed a man with an apparently heavy bulge in a front pocket of his sweatshirt, which appeared to be a handgun. The remote officer monitored the man, who later was identified as R.L. The remote officer saw R.L. enter the front passenger seat of a red and gold sedan, which was parked on 14th Avenue South along the curb. A person, later identified as Ryans, was sitting in the driver's seat of the sedan.

Approximately five minutes later, a man in a maroon T-shirt approached the passenger side of the sedan and leaned his head into the window for more than a minute. The remote officer recognized the man as A.B., who was known to be “a prolific fentanyl user.” A.B. walked away from the sedan but returned a few minutes later with a woman. A.B. and the woman spoke with each other and with the persons in the sedan while

frequently looking around the area. The woman leaned into the passenger-side window for several seconds, stepped back, exhaled smoke, and walked away.

Approximately one minute later, a person inside the sedan gave A.B. a piece of metal foil. A.B. placed a white straw-like object in his mouth, retracted his arms into his T-shirt, lowered his head, and inserted the straw-like object inside his T-shirt. The remote officer recognized this behavior as a way of smoking fentanyl.

Based on these observations, the officers decided to conduct an investigatory detention of the sedan and its occupants. Officers in two squad vehicles drove toward the sedan and simultaneously parked their vehicles in front of and behind the sedan to prevent it from driving away. One squad vehicle, driven by Officer Reynolds, made slight contact with the sedan's rear bumper before stopping.

As the two squad vehicles arrived and parked, Ryans and R.L. fled on foot. Officer Reynolds chased Ryans, apprehended him, and placed him under arrest. Officer Reynolds searched Ryans incident to the arrest and found substances he believed to be fentanyl and methamphetamine on Ryans's person and on the ground in his immediate vicinity. Meanwhile, another officer saw a firearm in plain view inside the sedan. Officers searched the sedan and found two firearms, one on the floor near the driver's seat and one between the center console and the front passenger seat. Officers also found a substance they believed to be fentanyl on the driver's seat.

The state charged Ryans with four drug-related crimes and one gun-related crime, as follows: (1) first-degree controlled-substance crime, in violation of Minn. Stat. § 152.021, subd. 1(3) (Supp. 2023), based on the allegation that he sold or possessed with

the intent to sell 10 or more grams of fentanyl; (2) first-degree controlled-substance crime, in violation of Minn. Stat. § 152.021, subd. 1(1) (Supp. 2023), based on the allegation that he sold or possessed with the intent to sell 17 or more grams of methamphetamine; (3) unlawful possession of a firearm by an ineligible person, in violation of Minn. Stat. § 624.713, subd. 1(2) (Supp. 2023); (4) second-degree controlled-substance crime, in violation of Minn. Stat. § 152.022, subd 2(a)(3) (Supp. 2023), based on the allegation that he possessed 6 or more grams of fentanyl, and (5) third-degree controlled-substance crime, in violation of Minn. Stat. § 152.023, subd. 2(a)(1) (Supp. 2023), based on the allegation that he possessed 10 or more grams of methamphetamine.

In December 2024, Ryans moved to suppress evidence, including the evidence found in the searches of his person and the sedan. In January 2025, the district court conducted an evidentiary hearing on the motion. The state called one witness, Officer Reynolds, who testified about his own observations as well as the information relayed to him by the remote officer. The state introduced three exhibits, including a recording of the surveillance video monitored by the remote officer.

After the presentation of evidence, Ryans's attorney argued orally that police officers did not have either reasonable suspicion or probable cause to justify the detention of the sedan. In response, the prosecutor argued that the officers had probable cause to arrest Ryans when they detained the sedan and also had probable cause to conduct a warrantless search of the sedan under the motor-vehicle exception to the warrant requirement. The state argued in the alternative that, if the officers had only reasonable suspicion of criminal activity at the time of the initial seizure, additional information

arising from Ryans's and R.L.'s flight and the firearm in plain view provided probable cause for Ryans's arrest and the searches of Ryans's person and vehicle.

In January 2025, the district court filed an order in which it denied Ryans's suppression motion. The district court concluded that the police officers' detention of the sedan was justified by probable cause. The district court also concluded that Officer Reynolds had probable cause to arrest Ryans and, thus, to perform a search of his person incident to the arrest. The district court further concluded that the officers had probable cause to search the sedan under the automobile exception.

The case was tried to a jury on three days in late January 2025. The state called six witnesses: including three law-enforcement officers and three forensic scientists. The state introduced nine exhibits, including a recording of the surveillance-camera video that was monitored by the remote officer and three body-worn-camera videorecordings. Ryans did not testify and did not present any other evidence.

The jury found Ryans guilty of the charges in count 3, which alleged unlawful possession of a firearm, and counts 4 and 5, which alleged possession of controlled substances. The jury acquitted Ryans of the charges in counts 1 and 2, which alleged possession of controlled substances with intent to sell them. In February 2025, the district court imposed concurrent prison sentences of 90 and 140 months on counts 3 and 4. Ryans appeals.

DECISION

Ryans argues that the district court erred by denying his motion to suppress evidence. His argument has two parts. First, he contends that police officers had only a

reasonable suspicion of criminal activity—not probable cause—when they detained the sedan. Second, he contends that police officers exceeded the scope of a valid investigatory detention by conducting a *de facto* arrest. In response, the state argues that, as the district court concluded, police officers had probable cause to arrest Ryans after the remote officer saw A.B. acquire and appear to smoke a substance while standing next to the sedan after speaking with persons inside the sedan. The state argues in the alternative that, if police officers did not have probable cause to arrest Ryans when they detained the sedan, they had at least a reasonable suspicion of criminal activity, and the manner of Ryans’s detention did not amount to a *de facto* arrest.

The United States and Minnesota constitutions guarantee the “right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures.” U.S. Const. amend. IV; Minn. Const. art. I, § 10. A warrantless seizure is unreasonable unless it falls “within one of the specifically established and well delineated exceptions to the warrant requirement.” *State v. Sargent*, 968 N.W.2d 32, 37 (Minn. 2021) (quotation omitted). “A warrantless arrest is reasonable if supported by probable cause.” *State v. Williams*, 794 N.W.2d 867, 871 (Minn. 2011).

“Probable cause to arrest exists when a person of ordinary care and prudence, viewing the totality of circumstances objectively, would entertain an honest and strong suspicion that a *specific* individual has committed a crime.” *State v. Glover*, 4 N.W.3d 124, 132 (Minn. 2024) (quotation omitted). The totality of the circumstances that may be considered “includes reasonable inferences that police officers draw from facts, based on their training and experience.” *State v. Lester*, 874 N.W.2d 768, 771 (Minn. 2016). If

“more than one police officer is involved in an investigation, the entire knowledge of the police force is pooled and imputed to the arresting officer for the purpose of determining if sufficient probable cause existed for an arrest.” *State v. Onyelobi*, 879 N.W.2d 334, 344 n.5 (Minn. 2016) (quotation omitted). In reviewing a district court’s ruling on a motion to suppress evidence, this court applies a clear-error standard of review to the district court’s factual findings and a *de novo* standard of review to the district court’s legal conclusions. *State v. Gauster*, 752 N.W.2d 496, 502 (Minn. 2008).

Ryans first argues that the district court erred by concluding that, before officers seized him by detaining the sedan, they had probable cause to believe that he and R.L. had engaged in drug transactions. Ryans argues that the officers had only a reasonable suspicion of criminal activity at that time.

Our *de novo* review of the totality of the circumstances leads to the conclusion that the officers had probable cause to believe that the two persons inside the sedan had engaged in drug transactions. The state presented evidence that police officers were patrolling the area because of concerns of criminal activity there, including drug-related offenses. The remote officer had experience and training in both firearms and narcotics investigations and had trained other officers on firearms and narcotics investigations. The remote officer saw a woman lean into a window of the sedan for several seconds before stepping back and exhaling smoke. The remote officer also saw A.B., who is known by officers to be “a prolific fentanyl user,” use foil and a straw-like object to smoke a substance inside his T-shirt while standing next to the sedan after speaking with persons inside the sedan. These facts are sufficient for trained and experienced officers to form an honest and strong belief

that the two persons inside the sedan had committed a crime by selling drugs. We have reviewed the videorecording monitored by the remote officer, and we have confirmed that the videorecording is of sufficient quality and clarity to allow an officer to perceive the facts necessary to form such a belief.

Ryans contends that the district court erred on the ground that the facts of this case are distinguishable from the facts of two cases cited in the district court's order. Specifically, Ryans contends that *State v. Mosley*, 994 N.W.2d 883 (Minn. 2023), is distinguishable because the officer in that case corroborated an informant's tip that the defendant possessed a firearm, and that *State v. Williams*, 794 N.W.2d 867 (Minn. 2011), is distinguishable because the defendant exposed a firearm in a public place. Ryans asserts that the officers in this case had less reason to believe that R.L. possessed a firearm. Ryans's contention ignores the evidence that the remote officer saw two persons openly use drugs while standing next to or leaning into the sedan after speaking with the persons inside the sedan. Those facts are sufficient to establish probable cause to believe that the persons inside the sedan had committed the crime of selling drugs, regardless of whether R.L. was carrying a firearm in a sweatshirt pocket.

The facts of this case are similar to those of *State v. Hawkins*, 622 N.W.2d 576 (Minn. App. 2001), in which this court concluded that police officers had probable cause to arrest a person who was engaging in conduct that, based on the officers' training and experience, was consistent with selling drugs. *Id.* at 581. Officers observed a person riding a bicycle at an intersection while whistling and waving at approaching vehicles. *Id.* An officer testified that, based on his training and experience, this conduct was common

among street-level narcotics dealers. *Id.* The officers also saw the person engage in two hand-to-hand transfers with other persons in a manner that was consistent with a drug transaction. *Id.* We concluded that the facts and circumstances, considered in light of the officers' training and experience, were "sufficient to permit a prudent person to reasonably believe that [the suspect] had engaged in the sale of drugs." *Id.* Similarly, the facts and circumstances of this case are sufficient to allow police officers to reasonably believe that the two persons inside the sedan had engaged in unlawful drug transactions.

Thus, the detention of the sedan and its two occupants, including Ryans, was supported by probable cause. Because we have rejected the first part of Ryans's argument, we need not consider the second part, which would be relevant only if we were to conclude that officers had only a reasonable suspicion of criminal activity when they detained the sedan.

In sum, the district court did not err by denying Ryans's motion to suppress evidence.

Affirmed.