

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by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
A25-1040**

In the Matter of the Welfare of: S. V. W., Child.

**Filed March 30, 2026
Affirmed
Larson, Judge**

Hennepin County District Court
File No. 27-JV-24-1841

Cathryn Middlebrook, Chief Appellate Public Defender, Chang Y. Lau, Assistant Public Defender, St. Paul, Minnesota (for appellant S.V.W.)

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

Mary F. Moriarty, Hennepin County Attorney, Shannon M. Harmon, Assistant County Attorney, Annika Schultz, Certified Law Student Practitioner, Minneapolis, Minnesota (for respondent State of Minnesota)

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

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

LARSON, Judge

Appellant S.V.W. challenges the district court’s delinquency adjudication for third-degree assault, arguing the state failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that appellant was not acting in self-defense. We affirm.

FACTS

The following facts were elicited at a bench trial. Appellant and C.S. (victim) were both students at Hopkins High School. In May 2024, appellant and victim engaged in a confrontation in the school's hallway. On the date of the incident, appellant was a 6-foot-3-inch-tall freshman, weighing approximately 150 pounds. Victim was a 5-foot-8-inch-tall junior, weighing approximately 130 pounds.

The confrontation started in a school bathroom, but recollections vary as to how the disagreement began. The pair eventually left the bathroom, trailed by appellant's friends. The group walked back and forth in the hallway while appellant and victim continued arguing with one another. Then, victim turned towards appellant, backing him against a wall. Appellant pivoted away from the wall and started walking backwards in the open hallway while victim walked forwards. Appellant then suddenly struck victim in the face with his right fist—breaking victim's jaw. After appellant struck victim, he stepped towards victim with his arms raised. Appellant's friend then stepped in front of him, and they walked away.

Respondent State of Minnesota filed a delinquency petition alleging one count of third-degree assault. Appellant raised a claim of self-defense. At a two-day trial, victim, a witness, a police detective, and appellant testified. The state also admitted security-camera footage depicting the incident as described above. The district court adjudicated appellant delinquent. In doing so, the district court concluded the state proved beyond a reasonable doubt that appellant did not act in self-defense because, as relevant here, he

could have reasonably avoided the danger by retreating down the hallway. The district court ordered appellant to serve two years of probation.

This appeal follows.

DECISION

Appellant challenges the district court's delinquency adjudication for third-degree assault, arguing the state failed to present sufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he was not acting in self-defense when he struck victim.

"In Minnesota, a person may act in self-defense if he or she reasonably believes that force is necessary and uses only the level of force reasonably necessary to prevent the bodily harm feared." *State v. Devens*, 852 N.W.2d 255, 258 (Minn. 2014). Self-defense includes the following elements:

(1) the absence of aggression or provocation on the part of the defendant; (2) the defendant's actual and honest belief that [they were] in imminent danger of . . . bodily harm; (3) the existence of reasonable grounds for that belief; and (4) the absence of a reasonable possibility of retreat to avoid the danger.

Id. (quotation omitted). "Once a defendant meets the burden of going forward with evidence to support a claim of self-defense, the [s]tate bears the burden to disprove, beyond a reasonable doubt, one or more of the four elements." *Id.* (quotation omitted); *State v. Radke*, 821 N.W.2d 316, 324 (Minn. 2012) ("[T]he [s]tate need only disprove . . . at least one of the elements of self-defense").

Here, we conclude the state presented sufficient evidence to prove that appellant had a reasonable possibility to retreat. The state disproved this element using the security-

camera footage, and the supreme court has held such evidence can serve as direct evidence on the possibility of the retreat element. *See State v. Blevins*, 10 N.W.3d 29, 40 (Minn. 2024). Accordingly, “the traditional standard for evaluating the sufficiency of the evidence applies.” *State v. Jones*, 4 N.W.3d 495, 501 (Minn. 2024). Under this standard, “we limit our review to a painstaking analysis of the record to determine whether the evidence, when viewed in a light most favorable to the conviction, was sufficient to permit the [factfinder] to reach the verdict which they did.” *State v. Horst*, 880 N.W.2d 24, 40 (Minn. 2016) (quotation omitted).

The security-camera footage clearly shows that, although appellant’s back was momentarily against the wall, at the time he struck victim his back was facing an open hallway. Thus, the security-camera footage plainly shows that appellant “had room behind him to retreat.” *See Blevins*, 10 N.W.3d at 40. Further, the trial testimony indicated that the open hallway led to an open area and the door for the wellness center. Moreover, appellant admitted during his testimony that he had other options to leave the confrontation, including seeking help from a teacher or running into a classroom adjacent to the hallway.

Based upon this direct evidence, we conclude the state presented sufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that appellant had the reasonable possibility to retreat.

Affirmed.