

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by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
A25-1391**

State of Minnesota,
Respondent,

vs.

Keira Ann Marie Conkling,
Appellant.

**Filed July 20, 2026
Affirmed
Bratvold, Judge**

Hennepin County District Court
File No. 27-CR-24-15794

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

Mary F. Moriarty, Hennepin County Attorney, Adam Petras, Senior Assistant County Attorney, N. Nate Summers, Assistant County Attorney, Minneapolis, Minnesota (for respondent)

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

Considered and decided by Larkin, Presiding Judge; Reyes, Judge; and Bratvold, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

BRATVOLD, Judge

On appeal from the final judgment of conviction for second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon, appellant argues that the stipulated evidence at her bench trial was

insufficient to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that she intended to inflict bodily harm on the victim, her father. We conclude that the district court's finding of guilt is supported by direct evidence of appellant's intent to inflict bodily harm on her father. Thus, we affirm.

FACTS

Respondent State of Minnesota charged appellant Keira Ann Marie Conkling with one count of second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon under Minnesota Statutes section 609.222, subdivision 1 (2022). Conkling pleaded not guilty, waived her right to a jury trial, and waived other trial rights under Minnesota Rule of Criminal Procedure 26.01, subdivision 3(b). The parties stipulated to the admission of 30 exhibits and submitted written trial arguments to the district court. The following summarizes the district court's written factual findings along with the stipulated evidence received at trial as that evidence is relevant to the issue on appeal.

At about 3:18 p.m. on July 11, 2024, Conkling's father called 911 to report that Conkling had attacked him with "her arms, her fists, and a knife." Father told the dispatcher that he was bleeding from his leg, both arms, and his chest. About six minutes earlier, Conkling had called 911 to report that she and father "got into an argument," that father "just tried to attack her," and that she "had to pin [father] down." Conkling stated that father was bleeding "but she wasn't sure from where."¹

¹ The record does not include a transcript of either 911 call. An audio recording of father's 911 call and a law enforcement report summarizing Conkling's 911 call were received as stipulated exhibits.

At 3:22 p.m., Brooklyn Center law-enforcement officers arrived at father's home, where Conkling had been living for about a month. When officers arrived, father, who was 64 years old, came to the door "covered in blood and officers began rendering immediate medical aid due to the severity of his injuries." First officer applied tourniquets to stop the bleeding from injuries to father's left arm and left leg, but observed that "the bleeding had not stopped." First officer, with the help of second officer, "assisted in applying gauze and wrapping [father's] leg to keep the bleeding under control."

Father was taken to the hospital in an ambulance. During the ambulance ride to the hospital, father gave first officer a recorded statement, which was summarized in first officer's report.² Father stated that Conkling had become upset because "Walmart deliveries were left in the wrong place." Conkling began "screaming about things being in her way." Father touched Conkling's arm while he was grabbing a case of water, and "the next thing he [knew] he [was] on the floor." Conkling pushed father, then she "fell on top of him and then would not get off of him." Father stated that Conkling "stabbed him and told him that she was going to kill him." Father also stated that Conkling had "gotten physical with him in the past."

After the altercation, Conkling fled to a neighbor's house. Neighbor told law-enforcement officers that Conkling was inside her house. Third officer took neighbor's

² The record does not include a recording of father's statement to first officer. The district court relied on the summary of father's statement, which was part of first officer's report and received as a stipulated exhibit.

recorded statement, which was summarized in third officer's report.³ Neighbor stated that Conkling knocked on her door and "was covered in blood and seemed extremely distraught and was asking for help." After neighbor let her in, Conkling told neighbor that she had "just gotten into a fight with her dad." Conkling stated, "[D]on't worry, it's not as bad as it looks, he just bleeds a lot." Conkling washed blood off her hands in neighbor's sink.

Neighbor explained that she stayed in her home and did not check on father because she was concerned that Conkling might flee. Law-enforcement officers arrested Conkling in neighbor's house. Photographs taken by the officers show blood on Conkling's legs and feet.

Meanwhile, father underwent surgery at the hospital. The surgeon's postoperative note summarized father's injuries:

- (1) Right cheek wound 2 cm; (2) Left dorsal hand laceration 2 cm with associated tendon injury; (3) Left dorsal forearm laceration 5 cm with associated tendon injury; (4) Left lateral knee laceration 12 cm; (5) Left anterior shin laceration 3 cm; (6) Right chest laceration 4 cm; (7) Upper lip laceration 1 cm.

The injuries were "only on the front side of [father's] body." Father passed away about three weeks later from causes unrelated to his injuries. The medical examiner's cause-of-death report was received as an exhibit at trial.

In his report, second officer described the appearance of father's home: "There was blood all over the main level of the home In the kitchen there was what appeared to be a whole drawer of knives and kitchen tools on the floor." A crime-scene investigator

³ Neighbor's recorded statement is not in the record. Third officer's report was received into evidence by stipulation.

collected four knives and a fork from father's house based on father's identification of what he thought were weapons that Conkling used to attack him. A photograph of the kitchen floor shows at least eight knives. The four knives and fork selected by law-enforcement investigators were later tested for DNA. Three of the knives and the fork had father's DNA; none of the items had Conkling's DNA.

In a written order, the district court found Conkling guilty of second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon. The district court found "no persuasive evidence" of self-defense and concluded that father's injuries were not consistent with Conkling's theory that father was "cut by the knives on the floor during the struggle." The district court stated that the record was "vague regarding the substance" of Conkling's 911 call, but found that Conkling's claim that father attacked her was not credible. The district court also found father's "statements to the 911 operator and the responding officers to be credible regarding what happened in the home."

At sentencing, the district court granted a downward dispositional departure, staying execution of Conkling's prison sentence of 21 months for three years. The district court's departure report stated that the sentencing departure was based on Conkling's "[a]cceptance and participation in Mental Health Court with intensive supervision and services."

Conkling appeals.

DECISION

Conkling argues that her conviction should be reversed because the state's evidence failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that she intended to cause father bodily harm.

Due process requires the state to prove every element of a charged crime beyond a reasonable doubt. *In re Winship*, 397 U.S. 358, 364 (1970); *State v. Merrill*, 428 N.W.2d 361, 366 (Minn. 1988); *see also* U.S. Const. amend. XIV; Minn. Const. art. I, § 7.

Minnesota appellate courts review the sufficiency of direct and circumstantial evidence under different standards. *State v. Horst*, 880 N.W.2d 24, 39-40 (Minn. 2016) (contrasting the “traditional” direct and circumstantial-evidence analyses for sufficiency of the evidence). Both parties argue the sufficiency of the evidence under the two-step analysis for circumstantial evidence. But we conclude that the state proved Conkling’s intent by direct evidence based on Conkling’s statements to her father.

Direct evidence is “evidence that is based on personal knowledge or observation and that, if true, proves a fact without inference or presumption.” *State v. Harris*, 895 N.W.2d 592, 599 (Minn. 2017) (quotation omitted). Thus, we apply the direct-evidence standard. *See Horst*, 880 N.W.2d at 39-40 (“[W]hen a disputed element is sufficiently proven by direct evidence alone . . . it is the traditional standard, rather than the circumstantial-evidence standard, that governs.”).

In reviewing the sufficiency of direct evidence, appellate courts conduct 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 [fact-finder] to reach the [finding] which they did.” *Id.* at 40 (quotation omitted); *see State v. Palmer*, 803 N.W.2d 727, 733 (Minn. 2011) (stating that appellate courts “use the same standard of review in bench trials and in jury trials in evaluating the sufficiency of the evidence”).

Conkling was convicted of second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon under Minnesota Statutes section 609.222, subdivision 1. An assault is defined in part as “the intentional infliction of or attempt to inflict bodily harm upon another.” Minn. Stat. § 609.02, subd. 10(2) (2022). Conkling does not challenge the district court’s finding that, “in assaulting [father],” she “used, or attempted to use, a dangerous weapon.” Conkling limits her challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence of her intent to harm father.

An assault that inflicts bodily harm is a general-intent crime. *State v. Fleck*, 810 N.W.2d 303, 309-10 (Minn. 2012). For a general-intent crime, the state must prove that Conkling “intended to do the physical act forbidden” but need not prove that “she meant to or knew that she would violate the law or cause a particular result.” *State v. Dorn*, 887 N.W.2d 826, 830 (Minn. 2016) (quotations omitted). Therefore, the evidence must show that Conkling did not harm father “accidentally or involuntarily.” *Id.* at 831.

The district court found father’s “statements to the 911 operator and the responding officers to be credible regarding what happened in the home.” In his statement to first officer during the ambulance ride, father reported that Conkling said “she was going to kill him” when she stabbed him. Viewed in the light most favorable to the district court’s finding, this is sufficient direct evidence to show that Conkling intended to inflict bodily harm on father. *See State v. Jones*, 4 N.W.3d 495, 500-01 (Minn. 2024) (determining that Jones’s statement, “I’m going to beat [the victim] bloody,” while wielding a board was direct evidence of Jones’s intent to inflict bodily harm).

To be complete, and because the parties both addressed the issue, we briefly discuss the sufficiency of circumstantial evidence to prove Conkling’s intent. “Intent is generally proven by circumstantial evidence.” *State v. Lampkin*, 994 N.W.2d 280, 291 (Minn. 2023).

Appellate courts apply a two-step analysis to evaluate the sufficiency of circumstantial evidence. *State v. Firkus*, 31 N.W.3d 468, 478 (Minn. 2026). Under the first step, we “winnow down the evidence presented at trial by resolving all questions of fact in favor of the [fact-finder’s finding], which results in a subset of facts that constitute the circumstances proved.” *Id.* (quotations omitted). At the second step, appellate courts consider “whether the reasonable inferences that can be drawn from the circumstances proved, when viewed as a whole and not as discrete, isolated facts, are consistent with the hypothesis that the accused is guilty and inconsistent with any rational hypothesis other than guilt.” *Id.* at 483. We independently review the reasonableness of inferences at this second step without deference to the fact-finder. *Id.* “If the circumstances proved, when viewed as a whole, support a reasonable inference that is inconsistent with guilt, the evidence is not sufficient to support the conviction, and we must reverse.” *Id.* (quotations omitted).

The relevant circumstances proved are that Conkling and father fought; Conkling “slashed and stabbed” father with a knife and said she “was going to kill him”; both Conkling and father called 911 to report the fight; father told the 911 operator that Conkling attacked him with her arms, fists, and a knife and that he was bleeding from his leg, arms, and chest; law-enforcement officers responded and found father covered in blood and bleeding profusely; father’s injuries required emergency medical treatment, and father was

transported by ambulance to a hospital and received surgery; during the ambulance ride, father gave a statement to police that Conkling had been upset and attacked him when he touched her while trying to move a case of water; when Conkling arrived at neighbor's house, she was covered in blood and washed blood off her hands; when police arrested Conkling, she had blood on her legs and feet; father suffered a face wound and six lacerations between one and 12 centimeters, all on the front of his body; father's kitchen was in disarray, and there was blood "all over the main level of the home"; Conkling's DNA was not on the four knives and one fork that investigators tested for DNA; and investigators documented at least eight knives on father's kitchen floor along with other utensils.

We conclude that the circumstances proved, when viewed as a whole, are consistent with the hypothesis that Conkling intended to harm father and inconsistent with any other rational hypothesis. *See Firkus*, 31 N.W.3d at 486. This court may infer that Conkling intended to cause bodily harm to father as a natural consequence of the act of stabbing him. *See Nelson v. State*, 880 N.W.2d 852, 860 (Minn. 2016) ("Intent can be inferred from the idea that a person intends the natural consequences of his or her actions." (quotation omitted)). And the severity of father's wounds, which were many, caused profuse bleeding, and required emergency treatment, supports the inference that Conkling intended to harm father. *See State v. Balandin*, 944 N.W.2d 204, 216 (Minn. 2020) (stating, in the context of murder charges, that intent to kill "can be inferred from the nature and extent of the victim's wounds").

Conkling contends that, under the two-step analysis for sufficiency of circumstantial evidence, there is an alternative, reasonable hypothesis that Conkling pinned father down “to subdue him and not with the intent to batter him” and that father’s injuries “were an unintended accidental result” of a struggle on a “knife covered narrow kitchen floor.” Conkling argues that her “theory of innocence”—that the cuts to father’s body “were an unintended, accidental result” of their struggle—“is supported by the lack of blood on Conkling’s arms, chest, and white tank top” and “the absence of Conkling’s DNA on the knives recovered from the scene.”

Conkling’s theory is not reasonable when viewed along with the other circumstances proved. The district court expressly found that Conkling “slashed and stabbed” father, Conkling stated that she was “going to kill” her father, and the number, severity, and location of the wounds on father’s body are not consistent with accidental injury. Because Conkling’s alternative hypothesis is not reasonable when viewed along with the circumstances proved as a whole, we must reject it. *See Firkus*, 31 N.W.3d at 483 (stating that, when analyzing the reasonableness of an inference, appellate courts view the circumstances proved “as a whole and not as discrete, isolated facts”).

In sum, the direct and circumstantial evidence was sufficient to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Conkling intended to harm father.

Affirmed.