

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by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
A25-1841**

Charles Thomas Marhula,
Appellant,

vs.

Lynn Eaton,
Respondent.

**Filed May 26, 2026
Affirmed
Beane, Judge**

Beltrami County District Court
File No. 04-CV-25-2359

C.T. Marhula, Bemidji, Minnesota (pro se appellant)

Margaret (Molly) R. Ryan, Julie J. Nierengarten, Meagher & Geer, P.L.L.P., Minneapolis,
Minnesota (for respondent)

Considered and decided by Smith, Tracy M., Presiding Judge; Schmidt, Judge; and
Beane, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

BEANE, Judge

Appellant Charles Thomas Marhula challenges the district court's order denying his petition for a harassment restraining order (HRO). Marhula, who is self-represented, appears to argue that the eggshell-plaintiff doctrine should apply because he has an anxiety disorder. We affirm.

FACTS

During a Rotary Club meeting, Marhula stood to share a “happy dollar,” during which a person shares good news or offers praise about a member. Respondent Lynn Eaton, the club’s president, approached Marhula, placed his hand “lightly” on Marhula’s shoulder, and told Marhula to leave the meeting. Marhula sat down and refused to leave. The meeting continued without further interaction between Eaton and Marhula. After the meeting, Marhula contacted law enforcement about the interaction, but they declined to investigate. Marhula then filed a petition for an HRO against Eaton.

Marhula testified at the hearing on his petition. He testified that the interaction with Eaton was a “onetime incident,” that there were no issues between them, and that this was the first time he had seen Eaton act this way. He also testified that there was no “bad blood” between him and Eaton before the interaction alleged in the petition. Marhula agreed that Eaton had the authority to ask Marhula to leave. But Marhula testified that he was worried he might faint during the interaction because he suffers from general anxiety and has fainted before. He was also concerned about what would happen to him “if they got [him] out in the hallway.” Marhula testified that he was “shocked, offended, and scared” but that, following the incident, he “finished [his] happy dollar and life went on.” The district court denied Marhula’s petition during the hearing.

Marhula appeals.

DECISION

We review a district court’s decision on an HRO for an abuse of discretion. *Harris ex rel. Banks v. Gellerman*, 954 N.W.2d 604, 610 (Minn. App. 2021). Harassment, as

relevant here, includes “*repeated* incidents of intrusive or unwanted acts, words, or gestures that have a substantial adverse effect or are intended to have a substantial adverse effect on the safety, security, or privacy of another.” Minn. Stat. § 609.748, subd. 1(a)(1) (2024) (emphasis added); *see also Dunham v. Roer*, 708 N.W.2d 552, 566 (Minn. App. 2006) (stating that harassment requires “*repeated* intrusive or unwanted acts, words, or gestures”), *rev. denied* (Minn. Mar. 28, 2006). Harassment “does not depend entirely on whether the ‘target’ suffers adverse effects.” *Dunham*, 708 N.W.2d at 566. A district court may grant an HRO if there are “reasonable grounds” to believe that harassment occurred. Minn. Stat. § 609.748, subd. 4(b) (2024).

The district court did not abuse its discretion in denying the HRO, as the record does not reflect repeated incidents between Marhula and Eaton that could satisfy the statutory definition of harassment. Marhula testified that he and Eaton had some interactions in the past, but he did not think there was conflict between the two. Marhula also described this as a “onetime incident,” said that this incident was the first time he had seen Eaton act this way, and explained that “something even close to this has never happened” before in his decades involved in the Rotary Club. Nothing in the record indicates that Eaton subjected Marhula to “repeated incidents of intrusive or unwanted acts, words, or gestures” that had a substantial adverse effect on his safety, security, or privacy. *See id.*, subd. 1(a)(1).

Marhula contends that the district court abused its discretion because, as an “eggshell plaintiff,” he is particularly sensitive to Eaton’s conduct. The sole case Marhula cites in support of this proposition, *Vosburg v. Putney*, 50 N.W. 403 (Wis. 1891), is a Wisconsin Supreme Court case and would not bind this court even if its holding applied to

these facts. The case also is not persuasive here because it does not apply the eggshell-plaintiff doctrine in the HRO context. Under Minnesota law, the eggshell-plaintiff doctrine relates only to the scope of damages a tort victim may collect. *Rowe v. Munye*, 702 N.W.2d 729, 741 (Minn. 2005) (explaining that the eggshell-plaintiff doctrine “makes the defendant responsible for all damages that the defendant legally caused even if the plaintiff was more susceptible to injury because of a preexisting condition or injury”). Marhula does not cite any authority suggesting that a district court should consider a person’s particular susceptibility to harassment in deciding whether to grant an HRO. Nor are we aware of any such authority. To the contrary, we have required a person seeking an HRO to demonstrate “an objectively reasonable belief” that they were subjected to harassing conduct. *Peterson v. Johnson*, 755 N.W.2d 758, 766 (Minn. App. 2008) (quotation omitted).

Because the record does not establish that Eaton subjected Marhula to conduct that would satisfy the statutory definition of harassment, the district court did not abuse its discretion by denying Marhula’s petition for an HRO.

Affirmed.