

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by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
A26-0310**

Lori Elaine Christensen, petitioner,
Appellant,

vs.

State of Minnesota,
Respondent.

**Filed October 12, 2026
Affirmed
Wheelock, Judge**

Ramsey County District Court
File No. 62SU-CR-22-2353

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

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

Caroline Bell Beckman, White Bear Township Prosecutor, Megan E. Oslund, Assistant Township Prosecutor, Erickson, Bell, Beckman & Quinn, PA, Roseville, Minnesota (for respondent)

Considered and decided by Wheelock, Presiding Judge; Frisch, Chief Judge; and Harris, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

WHEELOCK, Judge

Appellant challenges the denial of her petition for postconviction relief, arguing that there was insufficient evidence to support her conviction for disorderly conduct and that

she did not commit disorderly conduct because her conduct was directed at a township employee. We affirm.

FACTS

A jury found appellant Lori Elaine Christensen guilty of disorderly conduct in violation of Minn. Stat. § 609.72, subd. 1(3) (2022). We set forth the following facts based on the trial evidence.

On August 16, 2022, an employee of White Bear Township was mowing grass and maintaining a tract of land owned by the township that is adjacent to Christensen's property. After the employee finished mowing, he saw Christensen standing in the street and motioning for him to come over to her. Christensen had previously reported to the township her issues with its maintenance of that tract of land. As he had been instructed, the employee did not go over to or speak with Christensen and instead turned around and proceeded to his work truck to load the mower into the trailer.

The employee testified that, as he arrived at his truck, Christensen drove up to his location and placed her vehicle so that it was "sort of obstructing [his] ability to leave," "diagonally or crosswise in front of [his] vehicle." While she was about ten feet away, Christensen began filming the interaction on her phone and told the employee that she was dissatisfied with his mowing and repeatedly stated that he had missed an area of grass. The employee continued loading the mower into his truck; he "listened and listened" and then finally told Christensen that, if she had an issue, she needed to speak to the township office. The employee then got into his truck and "[d]id [his] best to get around her car, which was a direct obstruction to get out of that situation." The parties do not dispute that the video

Christensen filmed does not show that Christensen's vehicle blocked the employee's truck.¹

During his testimony, the employee was asked what he thought "Christensen was going to do at that point," and the employee responded, "I didn't really know. I was nervous about it I never had difficult interactions with anybody." When asked how he felt about being approached and "blocked . . . in," he stated, "I was afraid. That's all I can say, I was afraid. I didn't want a confrontation. That was not something I was comfortable with. And it's something I hadn't experienced before." The employee further stated that Christensen's "level of anger" was "noteworthy" because the lawn's care "seemed trivial." After his interaction with Christensen, the employee returned to the office and told his supervisor what occurred, but he was unaware of who subsequently contacted police.

On cross-examination, the employee explained that Christensen initially pulled her vehicle parallel to his so that her driver's side window was near him. He stated that, after he told Christensen to call the township, "she pulled her car around in front of [his] truck, which is not shown in the video."

Christensen testified that she placed her vehicle parallel to the employee's truck and asked if he was coming back to mow the strip that the township "had been ignoring."

¹ Although the video Christensen took on her phone of the interaction was admitted into evidence at trial, it is not available to this court because it was purged from the record by district court staff. The Office of the Clerk of the Appellate Courts sent the parties a letter alerting them that the district court had purged the video and that it is not available to us on appellate review. No party moved to supplement the record. We therefore proceed to address this case based upon the record before us.

Christensen stated that, after the employee told her to call the township, she was “[f]rustrated,” so she drove beyond the trailer hitched to the employee’s truck to obtain the trailer number. She asserted that, afterwards, she pulled away and drove home. She testified that the only part of the employee’s testimony with which she disagreed was his statement that she initially placed her vehicle diagonally in front of the employee’s truck. She stated that she parked parallel to his truck and never went to the front side of his truck. Christensen also agreed that she told the employee that she paid his wages, but denied swearing at him, stating that she did swear but only when talking about another township employee.

The jury found Christensen guilty, and the district court sentenced her to 90 days in jail, 80 days of which was stayed for one year of supervised probation and ten days of which was to be served on home detention.

Christensen filed a postconviction petition with the district court, arguing that the evidence is insufficient to sustain her conviction and that the conviction violates her right to free speech. The district court denied the petition on December 8, 2025.

Christensen appeals.

DECISION

A defendant may secure postconviction relief by petitioning the district court “to vacate and set aside the judgment . . . or make other disposition as may be appropriate.” Minn. Stat. § 590.01, subd. 1 (2024). We review a district court’s decision to summarily deny a postconviction petition for abuse of discretion. *Williams v. State*, 5 N.W.3d 399, 405 (Minn. 2024). A district court abuses its discretion in denying a postconviction petition

when it has “exercised its discretion in an arbitrary or capricious manner, based its ruling on an erroneous view of the law, or made clearly erroneous factual findings.” *Pearson v. State*, 891 N.W.2d 590, 596 (Minn. 2017) (quotation omitted).

I. The evidence is sufficient to support Christensen’s disorderly-conduct conviction.

Christensen was convicted of disorderly conduct. The statute for that offense prohibits a person “in a public or private place” from engaging in “offensive, obscene, abusive, boisterous, or noisy conduct or in offensive, obscene, abusive language tending reasonably to arouse alarm, anger, or resentment in others.” Minn. Stat. § 609.72, subd. 1(3). To be criminally liable, the person must act “knowing, or having reasonable grounds to know that it will, or will tend to, alarm, anger or disturb others or provoke an assault or breach of the peace.” *Id.*, subd. 1 (2022). Charges under this subdivision “must be closely scrutinized” to avoid interfering with First Amendment rights. *In re Welfare of M.A.H.*, 572 N.W.2d 752, 757 (Minn. App. 1997) (quoting *State v. Klimek*, 398 N.W.2d 41, 42 (Minn. App. 1986)). “[A] defendant’s words are considered as a ‘package’ in combination with conduct and physical movements, viewed in light of the surrounding circumstances.” *Id.* (quoting *Klimek*, 398 N.W.2d at 43).

The parties do not argue that Christensen’s words alone can support a conviction.²

The parties agree that Christensen’s words combined with her act of placing her vehicle to

² The mere content of speech is considered disorderly conduct only if it consists of “fighting words.” *State v. Crawley*, 819 N.W.2d 94, 105-06 (Minn. 2012). Fighting words are generally words that, “as a matter of common knowledge,” are “inherently likely to provoke” acts of violence by those persons to whom the statement is being addressed. *State v. Jorgenson*, 946 N.W.2d 596, 604 (Minn. 2020) (emphasis omitted) (quotation omitted).

block the employee's truck from leaving the interaction are sufficient to sustain the conviction. Christensen argues, however, that the state did not prove that she blocked the employee's truck because the evidence presented at trial, including Christensen's cell-phone video, does not show that she blocked the employee's truck.

The district court denied the petition for postconviction relief because Christensen's "words[,] coupled with her conduct and physical movements," supported the verdict. The district court stated that the "jury could have reasonably concluded" that Christensen "intentionally blocked [the employee]'s vehicle by parking at an angle in front of him as he described" and that Christensen's conduct caused the employee to be afraid.

When the challenged element is supported by direct evidence, "we must ascertain whether, given the facts in the record and the legitimate inferences that can be drawn from those facts, . . . the jury, acting with regard for the presumption of innocence and the State's burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, could reasonably conclude that the defendant was guilty." *State v. Jones*, 4 N.W.3d 495, 501 (Minn. 2024) (quotation omitted). "[W]e view the evidence in the light most favorable to the verdict and assume that the factfinder disbelieved any testimony conflicting with that verdict." *State v. King*, 990 N.W.2d 406, 416 (Minn. 2023) (quotation omitted); *accord State v. Loveless*, 987 N.W.2d 224, 246 (Minn. 2023) (stating that appellate courts "assume that the jury believed the state's witnesses and disbelieved any evidence to the contrary" (quotation omitted)).

The state does not argue that Christensen's statements to the employee constituted fighting words.

During the employee's testimony, the state introduced the cell-phone video into evidence and played it for the jury. On cross-examination, the employee agreed that Christensen initially placed her vehicle parallel to his truck but also stated, "My recollection is she pulled her car around in front of my truck, which is not shown in the video."

Credibility determinations are reserved for the jury, even when a witness's testimony contains inconsistencies or is uncorroborated. *State v. Epps*, 949 N.W.2d 474, 487 (Minn. App. 2020), *aff'd*, 964 N.W.2d 419 (Minn. 2021); *see also State v. Pendleton*, 706 N.W.2d 500, 511-12 (Minn. 2005) ("Even where witness credibility has been challenged, the jury may nonetheless believe the witness."). And we assume the jury believed the state's witness and disbelieved evidence to the contrary. *Loveless*, 987 N.W.2d at 246.

The disputed fact here is whether Christensen placed her vehicle in front of the employee's truck and blocked him in, preventing him from leaving. The parties presented conflicting evidence; the employee testified that Christensen blocked his truck, Christensen denied doing so, and the parties do not dispute that it was not shown in the video.³ Based on its verdict, the jury credited the employee's testimony over Christensen's testimony. The employee's testimony is direct evidence that Christensen pulled in front of his truck. Viewed in the light most favorable to the verdict, the evidence here is sufficient to support Christensen's conviction for disorderly conduct.

³ Because the parties do not dispute that the video does not show whether Christensen blocked the employee's truck, its relevance to the disputed fact is minimal.

II. The district court did not err by denying Christensen’s postconviction petition because the disorderly-conduct statute does not exclude conduct directed at a township employee.

The disorderly-conduct statute prohibits a person from engaging in enumerated conduct “tending reasonably to arouse alarm, anger, or resentment *in others*.” Minn. Stat. § 609.72, subd. 1(3) (emphasis added). Christensen argues that she cannot be convicted of disorderly conduct because the conduct was directed at a township employee in the scope of his employment and the statute’s use of the term “in others” cannot refer to a township employee.

We apply the plain meaning of statutory language unless it is ambiguous. *State v. Plancarte*, 20 N.W.3d 30, 37 (Minn. 2025). If the legislature has not defined a term, we may apply a dictionary definition in the context of the statute to determine whether the phrase is ambiguous. *Fordyce v. State*, 994 N.W.2d 893, 897 (Minn. 2023). The dictionary defines “others” as a “different person or thing” or “[p]eople aside from oneself.” *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* 1249 (5th ed. 2011). The dictionary definition does not include a limitation for township or other employees. *See id.*

We conclude that the disorderly-conduct statute unambiguously prohibits certain conduct directed at a person other than oneself, whether they are a township employee or not. Minnesota caselaw supports this interpretation. *See, e.g., State v. Zais*, 805 N.W.2d 32, 40 (Minn. 2011) (stating that disorderly conduct “may be committed when there is only one witness to the defendant’s conduct”); *State v. Reynolds*, 66 N.W.2d 886, 888 (Minn. 1954) (holding that it may be enough to constitute disorderly conduct under a predecessor

statute “if the peace of only one member of the public or of one person is disturbed”); *State v. Janecek*, 903 N.W.2d 426, 429-30 (Minn. App. 2017) (stating that disorderly conduct can occur when an individual “witness[es] the consequence or result of offensive conduct”; they need not witness the conduct contemporaneously).

Christensen cites *State v. Kaeo*, 512 P.3d 154, 155 (Haw. 2021), a decision from Hawai’i, to support her statutory-interpretation argument. We are not persuaded. We first observe that decisions from other states are not binding authority. *See Mahowald v. Minn. Gas Co.*, 344 N.W.2d 856, 861 (Minn. 1984). Second, neither the statute nor the conduct at issue in *Kaeo* is analogous to those here. In *Kaeo*, the Hawai’i Supreme Court interpreted the language of that state’s disorderly-conduct statute, which includes the element of “intending to cause (or recklessly creating the risk of causing) ‘physical inconvenience or alarm by a member or members of the *public*.’” 512 P.3d at 155 (emphasis added) (quoting Haw. Rev. Stat. § 711-1101(1) (2014)).

Kaeo was convicted of disorderly conduct after engaging in a protest blocking trucks from transporting goods to be used for a telescope that was under construction and inconveniencing “[a]bout twenty transport convoy workers.” *Id.* The Hawai’i Supreme Court determined that “public,” as used in the statute, means the “community or the people as a whole” and not members of an organization. *Id.* at 157. Because Kaeo’s conduct was directed at the workers, who all were affiliated with the same organization, and there was no evidence that Kaeo inconvenienced anyone other than the workers, his conduct did not meet the statute’s requirements. *Id.* at 160; *see State v. Lopez Ruiz*, No. CAAP-24-0000157, 2026 WL 1256977, at *1-2 (Haw. Ct. App. May 7, 2026)

(concluding that individual who yelled and knocked on a neighbor's walls and door at 1:00 a.m. did not violate Hawai'i's disorderly-conduct statute because there was no evidence of actual inconvenience to anyone other than the neighbor and the neighbor's boyfriend), *rev. granted* (Haw. Aug. 24, 2026).

Minnesota's disorderly-conduct statute does not include the word "public" or any other language that would exclude employees of an organization. *Kaeo* is not persuasive here. Because there is no legal authority to support that Minnesota's disorderly-conduct statute excludes conduct directed at a township employee, we conclude that the district court did not err in denying Christensen's petition for postconviction relief.

Affirmed.