

In the Supreme Court of the United States



STATE OF OKLAHOMA,

Petitioner,

v.

BEA ANN EPPERSON,

Respondent.

**On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the
Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals**

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

JOHN M. O'CONNOR

ATTORNEY GENERAL

MITHUN MANSINGHANI

SOLICITOR GENERAL

COUNSEL OF RECORD

CAROLINE HUNT

JENNIFER CRABB

ASSISTANT ATTORNEYS GENERAL

BRYAN CLEVELAND

RANDALL YATES

ASSISTANT SOLICITORS GENERAL

OFFICE OF THE OKLAHOMA

ATTORNEY GENERAL

313 N.E. TWENTY-FIRST STREET

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73105

(405) 522-4392

MITHUN.MANSINGHANI@OAG.OK.GOV

QUESTION PRESENTED

Whether *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, 140 S. Ct. 2452 (2020), should be overruled.

LIST OF PROCEEDINGS

Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals

No. F-2017-336

Bea Ann Epperson, Appellant v.

State of Oklahoma, Appellee

Date of Final Opinion: April 8, 2021

Oklahoma District Court (McIntosh County)

No. CF-2014-170

State of Oklahoma, Plaintiff v.

Bea Ann Epperson, Defendant

Date of Judgment and Sentence: March 23, 2017

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OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, dated April 8, 2021, is included in the Appendix at App.1a-11a. The order of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, dated August 21, 2020, remanding the case for an evidentiary hearing is included below at App.18a-22a. The Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law of the District Court in and for McIntosh County, State of Oklahoma, dated October 1, 2020, is included below at App.12a-17a. These opinions and orders were not designated for publication.



JURISDICTION

The judgment of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals was entered on April 8, 2021. App.1a. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. § 1257(a).



STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

18 U.S.C. § 1151 (in relevant part) **Indian country defined**

[T]he term ‘Indian country’, as used in this chapter, means (a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and, including rights-of-way running through the reservation.

18 U.S.C. § 1152 (in relevant part) **Law governing (Indian country)**

Except as otherwise expressly provided by law, the general laws of the United States as to the punishment of offenses committed in any place within the sole and exclusive jurisdiction of the United States, except the District of Columbia, shall extend to the Indian country.



STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Thousands of state criminal prosecutions have been called into question by this Court's decision in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, 140 S. Ct. 2452 (2020). Like in many other pending petitions before this Court, this case presents the question whether *McGirt* should be overruled. See, e.g., *Oklahoma v. Williams*, No. 21-265; *Oklahoma v. Mitchell*, No. 21-254. Review is warranted to examine that question. The petition for a writ of certiorari in this case should either be granted or, in the alternative, held if the petition in any other case presenting the same question is granted.

1. Respondent was president and owner of a building company. Tr. 35-37.* Steven and Kinya Meineke hired respondent to build a home, agreeing to pay her \$175,000. Tr. 35-37; State's Ex. 2. Although she was paid, respondent failed to pay subcontractors, who in turn threatened to place a lien on the Meinekes' home. Tr. 21-43, 55, 60-61. As a result, the Meinekes paid two subcontractors directly, despite having given respondent the money that should have covered the subcontractors' work. Tr. 17-20, 43, 48, 55-56.

Respondent admitted having cashed the checks given to her by the Meinekes at a casino (ostensibly so that she could pay the subcontractors in cash), and to comingling the Meinekes' money in a bank account with other funds. Tr. 42, 46-47. Of the \$128,000 the

* All fact citations are to respondent's trial transcripts (Tr.) and the State's trial exhibits (State's Ex.), which are available below. See Sup. Ct. R. 12.7.

Meinekes paid to respondent, \$69,000 was unaccounted for. Tr. 52-54.

Respondent was convicted of two counts of embezzlement of a building trust, and sentenced to five years imprisonment for each count, all suspended. Respondent appealed her convictions to the Court of Criminal Appeals.

2. After this Court issued its decision in *McGirt*, the Court of Criminal Appeals remanded the case to the trial court for an evidentiary hearing. On remand, the court accepted the parties' stipulations and found that respondent is an Indian, as an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation with 3/64 Cherokee blood. App.13a-14a. The court further concluded that the crimes occurred on the Creek reservation recognized by *McGirt*. App.14a.

The Court of Criminal Appeals reversed the convictions “[p]ursuant to *McGirt*[.]” App.5a. The opinion’s author, Judge Hudson, reiterated in a footnote his “previously expressed views on the significance of *McGirt*, its far-reaching impact on the criminal justice system in Oklahoma and the need for a practical solution by Congress.” App.5a.

Two judges wrote separate opinions. Judge Lumpkin concurred in the result. App.8a-10a. He expressed his view that the Court’s opinion in *McGirt* “contravened * * * the history leading to the disestablishment of the Indian reservations in Oklahoma,” but concluded that he was bound to follow it. App.8a.

Judge Lewis concurred in the result based on his previous concurrences in *Bosse* and *Hogner* in which he—in relevant part—explained that *McGirt* required reversal. App.11a; see *Hogner v. State*, 2021 OK CR 4,

¶¶ 1-5, ___ P.3d ___ (Lewis, J., concurring in results);
Bosse v. State, 484 P.3d 286, 299 (Okla. Crim. App.
2021) (Lewis, J., specially concurring).



REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

In the decision below, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals applied *McGirt* to free yet another criminal from state custody, exacerbating the crisis in the criminal-justice system in Oklahoma. As the State of Oklahoma has explained, reconsideration of *McGirt* is the only realistic avenue for ending the ongoing chaos affecting every corner of daily life in Oklahoma. *See, e.g.*, Pet. at 21-32, *Oklahoma v. Bosse*, No. 21-186. This case presents yet another opportunity to end the damage caused by *McGirt*. This petition should either be granted or, if a petition presenting the same question is granted, held pending a decision in the granted case and then disposed of as is appropriate.

McGirt was wrongly decided, and the Court's review is urgently needed because no recent decision has had a more immediate and disruptive effect on life in an American State. *McGirt* contravened longstanding precedent on the disestablishment of Indian reservations. 140 S. Ct. at 2485 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting). It did so by wrongly reasoning that historical materials showing the original public meaning of statutes may be considered in the disestablishment inquiry "only" to "clear up" statutory ambiguity. *See id.* at 2467-2468, 2469-2470 (majority opinion). But consideration of history is necessary precisely because it is unclear whether Congress's alienation of Indian lands at the turn of the century changed the Indian country status of the land. *See id.* at 2488 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting). Under the correct framework prescribed by this Court's precedent, it is clear that Congress disestablished the Creek

territory in Oklahoma, as well as the territories of the four other Oklahoma tribes. And with that conclusion, it is clear the decision below is incorrect and warrants reversal.

Overruling *McGirt* and restoring the state jurisdiction it stripped is important not only for this case and the victims of the crimes at issue. As the Chief Justice correctly predicted, the “burdens” of the *McGirt* decision on the State of Oklahoma have been “extraordinary.” 140 S. Ct. at 2500. The challenges from that seismic shift in jurisdiction have rippled through every aspect of life in Oklahoma. Most immediately, *McGirt* has jeopardized the state’s jurisdiction over thousands of criminal cases—this case being just one of them.

The question presented in this case is materially identical to those presented in other petitions already pending before this Court. *See supra* at 3. In the event certiorari is more appropriate in this case than in another case, the Court should grant review in this case to answer the question common to all of them. Alternatively, this Court should hold this petition pending the resolution of that question in another case.



CONCLUSION

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted. In the alternative, if the petition in another case presenting the same question is granted, the petition in this case should be held pending a decision there and then disposed of as is appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

JOHN M. O'CONNOR

ATTORNEY GENERAL

MITHUN MANSINGHANI

SOLICITOR GENERAL

COUNSEL OF RECORD

CAROLINE HUNT

JENNIFER CRABB

ASSISTANT ATTORNEYS GENERAL

BRYAN CLEVELAND

RANDALL YATES

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OFFICE OF THE OKLAHOMA

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313 N.E. TWENTY-FIRST STREET

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73105

(405) 522-4392

MITHUN.MANSINGHANI@OAG.OK.GOV

COUNSEL FOR PETITIONER

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