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Utah Court of Appeals

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Case No. 20160321-CA

UTAH COURT OF APPEALS

STATE OF UTAH, *Plaintiff/Appellee*,

v.

RICHARD SIMON GARCIA, Defendant/Appellant.

Brief of Appellee

Appeal from a sentence following a guilty plea to aggravated robbery, a first degree felony, in the Third Judicial District, Salt Lake County, the Honorable Paul B. Parker, presiding

> MARIAN DECKER (5688) Assistant Attorney General SEAN D. REYES (7969) Utah Attorney General 160 East 300 South, 6th Floor P.O. Box 140854 Salt Lake City, UT 84114-0854 Telephone: (801) 366-0180

Salt Lake District Attorney's Office

HERSCHEL BULLEN 369 East 900 South, No. 302 Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

Counsel for Appellant

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Counsel for Appellee

BRADFORD D. COOLEY

FILED UTAH APPELLATE COURTS

DEC 1 3 2016

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STATE OF UTAH, Plaintiff/Appellee,

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	MARIAN DECKER (5688) Assistant Attorney General SEAN D. REYES (7969) Utah Attorney General 160 East 300 South, 6 th Floor P.O. Box 140854 Salt Lake City, UT 84114-0854 Telephone: (801) 366-0180
HERSCHEL BULLEN 369 East 900 South, No. 302	BRADFORD D. COOLEY
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111	Salt Lake District Attorney's Office
Counsel for Appellant	Counsel for Appellee

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Case No. 20160321-CA

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UTAH COURT OF APPEALS

STATE OF UTAH, *Plaintiff/Appellee*,

v.

RICHARD SIMON GARCIA, Defendant/Appellant.

Brief of Appellee

STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

Defendant appeals from a sentence for aggravated robbery, a first degree felony. This Court has jurisdiction under Utah Code Ann. § 78A-4-103(2)(j) (West Supp. 2016-2017).

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Did the sentencing court abuse its discretion by sentencing Garcia to

prison rather than placing him on probation?

Standard of Review. Sentencing decisions are reviewed for abuse of

discretion. State v. Helms, 2002 UT 12, ¶8, 40 P.3d 626.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS, STATUTES, AND RULES

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There are no dispositive constitutional provisions, statutes, or rules at issue in this appeal.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

A. Summary of facts.¹

Midafternoon on 16 September 2014, West Valley City police officers responded to an apartment in west Salt Lake County, based on a report that three intruders were present. R3. Upon entering the apartment, officers found a man—who identified himself as Richard Montoya, but who was later identified as Defendant—slumped over the kitchen table, and who "kept sliding into the wall." *Id.* Defendant was also drooling, incoherent, and unable to stand on his own. *Id.* Defendant told officers he had taken a blue pill that he bought from someone else, but did not know what it was. *Id.* The officers took Defendant to Pioneer Valley Hospital for treatment. *Id.* After the officers left, however, Defendant pulled out an I.V. in his arm and walked away from the hospital. *Id.*

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¹ Because Defendant pleaded guilty, the facts are taken from the statement of probable cause (R3-4), his statement in support of his guilty plea (R55-61), the presentence report (187-201), and the sentencing hearing (R175-184). The sentencing transcript is attached as Addendum A.

Later that same day, near 6:00 p.m., Anthony King was at work delivering pizzas when Defendant approached King, who was standing outside of his car, and asked for a ride. *Id.* King told Defendant that he could not give him a ride because it was against his employer's policy to do so. *Id.* When King tried to get in his car, Defendant slammed the car door on King and began hitting him in the face. *Id.* Defendant "told King it was life or his car, so King got out and" Defendant stole King's car, an orange Dodge Neon. *Id.*

Shortly thereafter, West Valley City officers deployed spikes to stop the stolen Neon. R4. Defendant successfully swerved the Neon to avoid the first set of spikes. *Id.* However, when Defendant swerved to avoid a second set of spikes, he lost control of the Neon, striking both a wooden power pole and a chain link fence. *Id.* After crashing the Neon, Defendant and his female passenger fled on foot, but were quickly apprehended. *Id.* Defendant was again taken to Pioneer Valley Hospital to get treatment for injuries sustained in the crash. *Id.* One of the officers who responded to the hospital after the crash immediately recognized Defendant as the same incoherent man officers had encountered earlier that day, and who had falsely identified himself as another man. *Id.* Further investigation revealed that Defendant's driver's license was suspended and that he had active

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warrants. *Id.* Defendant's female cohort had drug paraphernalia and a knife on her person. *Id.*

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B. Summary of proceedings.

Defendant was charged with aggravated robbery, a first degree felony; failure to respond to an officer's signal to stop, a third degree felony; false information to a law enforcement officer, a class A misdemeanor; failure to stop at command of a law officer, a class A misdemeanor; and driving on a suspended or revoked operator's license, a class C misdemeanor. R1-3.

Following plea negotiations, Defendant pleaded guilty to aggravated robbery, a first degree felony. R55-61; R157-174. Defendant's signed plea statement indicated that he "unlawfully and intentionally took a motor vehicle from another person by use of force or fear." R56. The remaining charges were dismissed, along with Defendant's charges in two other cases. R55; R160.

The presentence report (PSR) detailed Defendant's extensive criminal history, including his poor supervision history. R188,193-197. Three out of four times Defendant had been previously granted probation, his probation was revoked as unsuccessful. *See* R193-194. Defendant had also served sentences in both state and federal prison. R188. Given Defendant's

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extensive criminal history, which included two prior violent felonies, and his poor supervision history, the PSR recommended the statutory prison term of five years to life. R188.

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At the sentencing hearing, defense counsel asked the trial court to consider sentencing Defendant "one degree lower to a one to 15." R178. In support, counsel argued that Defendant was on the wait list for treatment at Odyssey House, that he had been on the wait list for "many months," and that it usually takes "nine, 10, 12 months to get into the program." *Id.* Defense counsel also argued that Defendant had taken advantage of other treatment opportunities, that he was 45 years old and thus "getting to the point where most people age out of criminal conduct," that Defendant was remorseful, and that on the day of the aggravated robbery Defendant had "taken a medication [Xanax] that he was unaware of," but that Defendant was also "acknowledging responsibility." R178-179.

Finally, defense counsel acknowledged that Defendant had "a substance abuse issue . . . for methamphetamine." R179. Although Defendant had stopped drinking, and also stopped using tobacco and other drugs, he had not stopped using methamphetamine: "That's a difficult one to overcome." *Id.* Accordingly, Defendant wanted to "enter a serious inpatient program to address that, which in this case would be at the

-5-

Odyssey House." *Id.* Defense counsel pointed out that Defendant had "done a fair amount of time in jail on this," and that he "would also do a lot more jail before he would even be eligible to go to the top of the list at Odyssey House." *Id.*

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The prosecutor argued that Defendant's history did not show that he would be successful on probation, or that any sentence other than a prison term "would be appropriate." R179-180. Indeed, the PSR put Defendant "firmly in the imprisonment category with the 10 year presumptive initial sentence." R180. To the extent Defendant asserted that the aggravated robbery here was induced by his drug activity, the prosecutor pointed out that "arguably, anything can fall under the header of drug induced activity," and that while "there are property crimes that people do in order to obtain drugs," Defendant's crimes were "violent felonies" that were "[n]ot obviously motivated by any sort of desire for drugs or any desire for anything other than to behave violently." Id. Given Defendant's history, including the instant aggravated robbery, the prosecutor argued that Defendant had shown himself to be "a dangerous individual" who represented "a significant threat to society." *Id.* Accordingly, a prison term was "the only appropriate sanction." *Id.*

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Defendant also addressed the trial court. R180. Defendant acknowledged that he had "a serious problem" with methamphetamine, but asked for another chance to address it. Id. Defendant also claimed not to remember anything about the aggravated robbery, but emphasized that he was "not trying to minimize" his criminal conduct. R181. Rather, Defendant argued that "if given one more chance or one opportunity," he could "probably become . . . a good part of society." Id. Defendant acknowledged that probation "would be a serious test" for him, however, where he "would be out in the streets where there are other controlled – where there's other substance is, where whatnot, and that's where you really test my-show my-what I want to do with my life and not just sit here and give you empty promises." Id. Defendant also acknowledged that he had previously been enrolled at school, but that he "just messed up," and lost his "place to live." Id.

The trial court imposed the statutory term of five years to life, and imposed restitution in the amount of \$10,350 to King, and \$13,085.54 to Rocky Mountain Power. R182. The trial court understood that Defendant wanted another chance at probation, but the court had to "balance" Defendant's interests with society's interests. *Id.* Given Defendant's poor history, including the frightening nature of the aggravated robbery where

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Defendant "found someone, beat him up, and stole his car, ran it into a telephone post," the trial court concluded Defendant was "a danger, not only to the person [he] beat up, but everybody on the road in between as this chase occurred." *Id.* The trial court thus determined that Defendant needed "to be in prison." *Id.*

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Defendant timely appealed. R140-141.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Defendant argues that the trial court abused its discretion by sentencing him to the statutory prison term instead of placing him on probation. He broadly argues that the trial court did not adequately weigh his desire to conquer his meth addiction and put too much weight on his poor supervision history, and the circumstances surrounding the aggravated robbery. But on this record, Defendant has not shown—and cannot show—that no reasonable sentencing judge would conclude that Defendant's repeated failures to change and the violent nature of the aggravated robbery warranted imprisonment.

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ARGUMENT

I.

The sentencing court did not abuse its discretion by sentencing Defendant to prison rather than placing him on probation.

Defendant does not argue that the sentencing court failed to consider any relevant factor. *See* Aplt.Br.7. Rather, Defendant asserts that the trial court did not give enough weight to his "accomplishments while incarcerated," his alleged "reentry plan," his desire "to address his meth addiction problem, or the fact that he was on a waiting list for Odyssey House. Aplt.Br.7. Defendant further suggests that the trial court gave too much weight to his poor criminal history and the nature and circumstances of the violent aggravated robbery. *Id.* Defendant has not shown—and cannot show—that the court's balancing of these factors was unreasonable and rendered the result inherently unfair.

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"A sentence in a criminal case should be appropriate for the defendant in light of his background and the crime committed and also serve the interests of society which underlie the criminal justice system." *State v. McClendon,* 611 P.2d 728, 729 (Utah 1980). That said, the court's sentencing decision "necessarily reflects the personal judgment of the court." *State v. Gerrard,* 584 P.2d 885, 887 (Utah 1978).

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Sentencing courts traditionally have "wide latitude and discretion in sentencing." State v. Woodland, 945 P.2d 665, 671 (Utah 1997). A sentence will not be overturned unless the sentencing court bases its decision on some wholly irrelevant or improper factor, fails to consider all legally relevant factors, imposes a sentence that exceeds statutory or constitutional limits, or otherwise rules in a manner so inherently unfair that the sentence is an abuse of discretion. State v. Helms, 2002 UT 12, ¶8, 40 P.3d 626; State v. Sibert, 310 P.2d 388, 393 (Utah 1957); State v. Sotolongo, 2003 UT App 214, ¶3, 73 P.3d 991. And absent a showing to the contrary, this Court must presume that the sentencing court considered all relevant factors and did not consider irrelevant ones. See Helms, 2002 UT 12, ¶¶11-12; see also State v. Robison, 2006 UT 65, ¶21, 147 P.3d 448 (discussing presumption of regularity attaching to court rulings). In short, a sentencing court abuse does not abuse its discretion unless "no reasonable [person] would take the view" adopted by the sentencing court. State v. Valdovinos, 2003 UT App 432, ¶14, 82 P.3d 1167 (alteration in original) (internal quotation omitted).

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Moreover, defendants have no right to probation. *State v. Mungia*, 2011 UT 5, ¶ 24, 253 P.3d 1082. Rather, the sentencing court may grant probation in its discretion. *Id.* That is because the "granting or withholding of probation involves considering intangibles of character, personality and

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attitude, of which the cold record gives little inkling." Sibert, 310 P.2d at 393; accord State v. Killpack, 2008 UT 49, ¶58, 191 P.3d 17; see also State v. Rhodes, 818 P.2d 1048, 1051 (Utah Ct. App. 1991) ("[T]he discretionary imposition of probation rests in many cases upon subtleties not apparent on the face of a cold record"). Furthermore, these intangibles must be "considered in connection with the prior record of the accused," Sibert, 310 P.2d at 393, along with considerations of "rehabilitation[,] . . . deterrence, punishment, restitution, and incapacitation," Rhodes, 818 P.2d at 1051. Ultimately, the sentencing court must exercise its discretion in determining what it believes "will best serve the ends of justice and is compatible with the public interest." *Id*.

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As stated, Defendant does not claim that the trial court failed to consider any required factor; rather, Defendant's complaint is that the court did not adequately consider factors favorable to him. Aplt.Br.7. In other words, Defendant disagrees with how the court assessed and weighed the competing factors. But mere disagreement with the sentencing court's assessment is not enough. Defendant must show that "no reasonable [person] would take the view" adopted by that court. *Valdovinos*, 2003 UT App 432, ¶14 (alteration in original) (internal quotation omitted). Defendant cannot make that showing here.

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The trial court balanced the various factors weighing for and against prison, including Defendant's poor criminal history (including three prior revocations of probation and two violent felonies), and the violent nature of the instant aggravated robbery. See R182; see also R187-201. The court also considered Defendant's admission that addicted he was to methamphetamine, as well as his assertions that he was remorseful, that he wanted to change and had conquered his other addictions, and that he was on the waiting list for Odyssey House. See id. But the court implicitly found Defendant incredible. See State v. Goodman, 763 P.2d 786, 788 (Utah 1988) (noting appellate courts give "'due regard . . . to the opportunity of the trial court to judge the credibility of the witnesses'" (quoting Utah R. Civ. P. It implicitly recognized that Defendant had been given 52(a))). opportunities to change in the past-and had squandered them. See R182. The court thus concluded that it was time to move beyond probation and impose a more significant punishment for Defendant's violent crime:

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Sir, I understand what you're saying, that you would like a chance, but at some level I have to balance your interests with the society – with society's interests, and I certainly do try that in a lot of cases, and I'm willing to go out on a limb in the appropriate case. Unfortunately, your history is such that I just cannot do that. The nature of this crime is such – if, in fact, it is [a] frightening crime. You found someone, beat him up, and stole his car, ran it into a telephone post. You're a danger, not only to the person you beat up, but everybody on the road in between as this chase occurred. You simply need to be in

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prison, and your history has shown that. That's what I have to impose.

Id.

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Given Defendant's poor criminal history, his admitted addiction to methamphetamine, the fact that he had yet to be accepted to Odyssey House, and the violent nature of the aggravated robbery here, Defendant cannot show that no reasonable jurist would have committed him to prison.

Defendant points to nothing inherently unfair or unreasonable about the court's conclusion that he had not earned the right to yet another chance at probation—and State-provided inpatient substance abuse treatment—in light of all the factors weighing in favor of imprisonment. *See Killpack*, 2008 UT 49, ¶59 ("[O]ne factor in mitigation or aggravation may weigh more than several factors on the opposite scale." (internal quotation omitted)). Nor is the prison sentence rendered an abuse of discretion by virtue of Defendant's weighing the factors differently than the trial court. *See id.* ¶¶59-61 (rejecting defendant's claim that mitigating factors considered by the sentencing court should have weighed in favor of probation). In short, the trial court acted well within its discretion when it determined that Defendant was a "danger" to society and needed to be in prison. R182.

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CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Court should affirm.

Respectfully submitted on December 13, 2016.

SEAN D. REYES Utah Attorney General

John J. Ne

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for MARIAN DECKER Assistant Attorney General Counsel for Appellee

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that on December 13, 2016, two copies of the Brief of Appellee were \square mailed \square hand-delivered to:

Herschel Bullen 369 East 900 South, No. 302 Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

Also, in accordance with Utah Supreme Court Standing Order No. 8,

a courtesy brief on CD in searchable portable document format (pdf):

is was filed with the Court and served on appellant.

 \Box will be filed and served within 14 days.

Addenda

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Addenda

Addendum A

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Addendum A

SALT LAKE COUNTY, STATE OF UTAH

STATE OF UTAH,	: Case No. 141910607 FS
Plaintiff,	: Appellate Court Case No. 20150470
v	
RICHARD SIMON GARCIA,	:
Defendant.	: : With Keyword Index

SENTENCING MARCH 23, 2015

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BEFORE

THE HONORABLE PAUL B. PARKER

CAROLYN ERICKSON, CSR CERTIFIED COURT TRANSCRIBER 1775 East Ellen Way Sandy, Utah 84092 801-523-1186

APPEARANCES

• For the Plaintiff:

For the Defendant:

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BRADFORD D. COOLEY Assistant District Attorney

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DAVID P. S. MACK Attorney at Law

* * * INDEX

SENTENCE

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SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH - MARCH 23, 2015 1 JUDGE PAUL B PARKER 2 (Transcriber's note: Identification of speakers 3 may not be accurate with audio recordings.) 4 PROCEEDINGS 5 6 MR. MACK: Judge, will you call the Richard Garcia 7 matter? THE COURT: All right. 8 (Concludes previous case) 9 THE COURT: This is 141910607, State vs. Richard 10 11 Simon Garcia. Mr. Mack for the defendant. Mr. Cooley for 12 the State. This is also a sentencing. 13 MR. MACK: Yes. THE COURT: Are you Richard Simon Garcia? 14 15 DEFENDANT GARCIA: Yes, I am, Your Honor. THE COURT: All right. What are we doing? 16 17 MR. MACK: This is the time for sentencing, Your 18 Honor. THE COURT: Do you have a copy of the pre-sentence 19 20 report? 21 MR. MACK: I do. 22 THE COURT: Any corrections or additions? MR. MACK: No, Your Honor. 23 THE COURT: Go ahead then. 24 25 MR. MACK: Your Honor, we have a couple of requests.

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First is we would ask you to consider sentencing 1 2 Mr. Garcia one degree lower to a one to 15. He is on the 3 list for inpatient treatment at the Odyssey House. He's been 4 on the list for many months, but it does require almost a 5 year usually - nine, 10, 12 months to get into the program. He's working his way up that list. That is our first 6 7 request, Your Honor. Secondly, if I may approach to - I've shown these 8 9 to Mr. Cooley. 10 THE COURT: Certainly. 11 MR. MACK: If I can show you what he's been involved 12 in while he's been in custody? 13 He's taken advantage of any treatment opportunities 14 that have been available to him. He's 45 years old. He's getting to that point 15 16 where most people age out of criminal conduct. And in this 17 case, I know that he has great remorse for his behavior. He 18 - and I think there's some mention by his part, but at least 19 in the police report, there's some mention of him having taken a medication that he was unaware of. 20 21 THE COURT: Xanax? 22 MR. MACK: Yes, Xanax. And, in fact, did enter a 23 plea in this case, but had very little memory of the 24 incident. 25 I guess, that's the second reason for - that we'd 2

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1 ask you to consider sentencing in one degree lower. He's 2 acknowledging responsibility. He was found in his car, and 3 he's not contesting that he did what he's accused of doing, 4 but he is saying that under usual circumstances and the 5 behavior that he's more recently been involved in, that this 6 would not have happened.

Also, though, he recognizes that he has a substance
abuse issue. Not for Xanax particularly, but for
methamphetamine.

10 He's been through and quit other substances during 11 his life. He's stopped drinking. He's stopped using 12 tobacco. He's stopped using other drugs, but he has not 13 stopped using or didn't - had not stopped using methamphetamine. That's a difficult one to overcome, and he 14 15 is looking, if he could, to enter a serious inpatient program 16 to address that, which in this case would be at the Odyssey 17 House.

He's done a fair amount of time in jail on this. He would also do a lot more jail before he would even be eligible to go to the top of the list at Odyssey House.

That is our request, Your Honor.

THE COURT: The State?

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23 MR. COOLEY: Your Honor, the State's joining that 24 you keep these recommendations. Nothing in the defendant's 25 history suggests that any sent - any other sentence would be

1 appropriate. It maxes out on the sentencing matrix with 2 landing firmly in the imprisonment category with the 10 year 3 presumptive initial sentence.

On top of that, the conduct here - it's - arguably, anything can fall under the header of drug induced activity, but there are property crimes that people do in order to obtain drugs, and then there are the crimes that the defendant has committed, which were violent felonies. Not obviously motivated by any sort of desire for drugs or any desire for anything other than to behave violently.

11 One of the cases was dismissed at preliminary 12 hearing, but the other, an aggravated burglary, was dismissed 13 in exchange for the plea in this case.

The defendant's history support the prison
sentence. The defendant's conduct here doesn't say anything
about drug use. It says the defendant's a dangerous
individual and represents a significant threat to society.
Imprisonment is the only appropriate sanction.

19 THE COURT: Sir, is there anything you want to say 20 to me before I impose sentencing?

DEFENDANT GARCIA: Yes, Your Honor. I'd like to address this. I do have a serious problem. I understand that, and I just would be - like to be given one chance to address this.

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I know that right before I came in here, I didn't

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have a problem with amphetamines. And just as Mr. Mack said, 1 2 I don't really recollect anything, but I'm not trying to 3 minimize my crime or take anything away from Mr. King. I pray every night that I - that what I did to this 4 gentleman, this young man, does not affect his life, and I 5 just want to - I'd like to address this one last issue. 6 I feel that if given one more chance or one 7 opportunity, I think that I can probably become a proper - a 8 very prosper - or a good part of society. You know, I just 9 10 feel that given - I just - I took a class when I was in a 11 federal prison, and I completed it, but that was in a 12 controlled environment. I would - I know that a serious test 13 would be would be out in the streets where there are other 14 controlled - where there's other substance is, where whatnot, 15 and that's where you really test my - show my - what I want to do with my life and not just sit here and give you empty 16 17 promises. 18 I know that given a chance - I was - as I said 19 right before I came to jail - about six months before I came 20 to jail, I was enrolled to go to Stevens-Henager College, and 21 I - just like I say, I just messed up. I lost my place to 2.2 live, and I'm not making excuses for my behavior. I did

24 | this young man.

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THE COURT: All right, thank you. Is the victim

something very terrible that I can never be excused for to

here that he would like to speak? 1

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MR. MACK: He is not. No, Your Honor.

3 THE COURT: All right. On the first degree felony 4 charge, I am going to impose five years to life in the Utah 5 State Prison, impose restitution in the amount of \$10,350 to 6 Anthony King, and \$13,085.54 to Rocky Mountain Power.

7 Sir, I understand what you're saying, that you 8 would like a chance, but at some level I have to balance your 9 interests with the society - with society's interests, and I 10 certainly do try that in a lot of cases, and I'm willing to 11 go out on a limb in the appropriate case. Unfortunately, 12 your history is such that I just cannot do that. The nature 13 of this crime is such - if, in fact, it is frightening crime. 14 You found someone, beat him up, and stole his car, ran it 15 into a telephone post. You're a danger, not only to the 16 person you beat up, but everybody on the road in between as 17 this chase occurred. You simply need to be in prison, and your history has shown that. That's what I have to impose. 18 19 DEFENDANT GARCIA: Okay. 20 THE COURT: So good luck to you, sir. 21 DEFENDANT GARCIA: May I ask for a forthwith, Your 22 Honor? 23 THE COURT: A forthwith? Absolutely. 24 DEFENDANT GARCIA: Okay, thank you, Your Honor. 25 THE COURT: All right. (Concluded) (8-5-15) 6

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March 23, 2015

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