

XVII. POSTCONVICTION RELIEF

RULE 3.850. MOTION TO VACATE, SET ASIDE, OR CORRECT

April 30, 2015

Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure

237

SENTENCE

(a) Grounds for Motion. The following grounds may be claims for relief from judgment or release from custody by a person who has been tried and found guilty or has entered a plea of guilty or nolo contendere before a court established by the laws of Florida:

- (1) The judgment was entered or sentence was imposed in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States or the State of Florida.
- (2) The court did not have jurisdiction to enter the judgment.
- (3) The court did not have jurisdiction to impose the sentence.
- (4) The sentence exceeded the maximum authorized by law.
- (5) The plea was involuntary.
- (6) The judgment or sentence is otherwise subject to collateral attack.

(b) Time Limitations. A motion to vacate a sentence that exceeds the limits provided by law may be filed at any time. No other motion shall be filed or considered pursuant to this rule if filed more than 2 years after the judgment and sentence become final unless it alleges that

(1) the facts on which the claim is predicated were unknown to the movant or the movant's attorney and could not have been ascertained by the exercise of due diligence, and the claim is made within 2 years of the time the new facts were or could have been discovered with the exercise of due diligence, or

(2) the fundamental constitutional right asserted was not established within the period provided for herein and has been held to apply retroactively, and the claim is made within 2 years of the date of the mandate of the decision announcing the retroactivity, or

(3) the defendant retained counsel to timely file a 3.850 motion and counsel, through neglect, failed to file the motion. A claim based on this

exception shall not be filed more than 2 years after the expiration of the time for filing a motion for postconviction relief.

(c) Contents of Motion. The motion must be under oath stating that the defendant has read the motion or that it has been read to him or her, that the defendant understands its content, and that all of the facts stated therein are true and correct. The motion must also include an explanation of:

- (1) the judgment or sentence under attack and the court that rendered the same;
- (2) whether the judgment resulted from a plea or a trial;
- (3) whether there was an appeal from the judgment or sentence and the disposition thereof;
- (4) whether a previous postconviction motion has been filed, and if so, how many;
- (5) if a previous motion or motions have been filed, the reason or reasons the claim or claims in the present motion were not raised in the former motion or motions;
- (6) the nature of the relief sought; and
- (7) a brief statement of the facts and other conditions relied on in support of the motion.

This rule does not authorize relief based on grounds that could have or should have been raised at trial and, if properly preserved, on direct appeal of the judgment and sentence. If the defendant is filing a newly discovered evidence claim based on recanted trial testimony or on a newly discovered witness, the defendant shall include an affidavit from that person as an attachment to his or her motion. For all other newly discovered evidence claims, the defendant shall attach an affidavit from any person whose testimony is necessary to factually support the defendant's claim for relief. If the affidavit is not attached to the motion, the defendant shall provide an explanation why the required affidavit could not be obtained.

(d) Form of Motion. Motions shall be typewritten or hand-written in legible printed lettering, in blue or black ink, double-spaced, with margins no less than 1 inch on white 8 1/2-by-11 inch paper. No motion, including any memorandum of law, shall exceed 50 pages without leave of the court upon a showing of good cause.

(e) Amendments to Motion. When the court has entered an order under subdivision (f)(2) or (f)(3), granting the defendant an opportunity to amend the motion, any amendment to the motion must be served within 60 days. A motion may otherwise be amended at any time prior to either the entry of an order disposing of the motion or the entry of an order pursuant to subdivision (f)(5) or directing that an answer to the motion be filed pursuant to (f)(6), whichever occurs first. Leave of court is required for the filing of an amendment after the entry of an order pursuant to subdivision (f)(5) or (f)(6). Notwithstanding the timeliness of an amendment, the court need not consider new factual assertions contained in an amendment unless the amendment is under oath. New claims for relief contained in an amendment need not be considered by the court unless the amendment is filed within the time frame specified in subdivision (b).

(f) Procedure; Evidentiary Hearing; Disposition. On filing of a motion under this rule, the clerk shall forward the motion and file to the court. Disposition of the motion shall be in accordance with the following procedures, which are intended to result in a single, final, appealable order that disposes of all claims raised in the motion.

(1) Untimely and Insufficient Motions. If the motion is insufficient on its face, and the time to file a motion under this rule has expired prior to the filing of the motion, the court shall enter a final appealable order summarily denying the motion with prejudice.

(2) Timely but Insufficient Motions. If the motion is insufficient on its face, and the motion is timely filed under this rule, the court shall enter a nonfinal, nonappealable order allowing the defendant 60 days to amend the motion. If the amended motion is still insufficient or if the defendant fails to file an amended motion within the time allowed for such amendment, the court, in its discretion, may permit the defendant an additional opportunity to amend the motion or may enter a final, appealable order summarily denying the motion with prejudice.

(3) Timely Motions Containing Some Insufficient Claims. If the motion sufficiently states one or more claims for relief and it also attempts but fails to state additional claims, and the motion is timely filed under this rule, the court shall enter a nonappealable order granting the defendant 60 days to amend the motion to sufficiently state additional claims for relief. Any claim for which the insufficiency has not been cured within the time allowed for such amendment shall be summarily denied in an order that is a nonfinal, nonappealable order, which may be reviewed when a final, appealable order is entered.

(4) Motions Partially Disposed of by the Court Record. If the motion sufficiently states one or more claims for relief but the files and records in the case conclusively show that the defendant is not entitled to relief as to one or more claims, the claims that are conclusively refuted shall be summarily denied on the merits without a hearing. A copy of that portion of the files and records in the case that conclusively shows that the defendant is not entitled to relief as to one or more claims shall be attached to the order summarily denying these claims. The files and records in the case are the documents and exhibits previously filed in the case and those portions of the other proceedings in the case that can be transcribed. An order that does not resolve all the claims is a nonfinal, nonappealable order, which may be reviewed when a final, appealable order is entered.

(5) Motions Conclusively Resolved by the Court Record. If the motion is legally sufficient but all grounds in the motion can be conclusively resolved either as a matter of law or by reliance upon the records in the case, the motion shall be denied without a hearing by the entry of a final order. If the denial is based on the records in the case, a copy of that portion of the files and records that conclusively shows that the defendant is entitled to no relief shall be attached to the final order.

(6) Motions Requiring a Response from the State Attorney. Unless the motion, files, and records in the case conclusively show that the defendant is entitled to no relief, the court shall order the state attorney to file, within the time fixed by the court, an answer to the motion. The answer shall respond to the allegations contained in the defendant's sufficiently pleaded claims, describe any matters in avoidance of the sufficiently pleaded claims, state whether the defendant has used any other available state postconviction

remedies including any other motion under this rule, and state whether the defendant has previously been afforded an evidentiary hearing.

(7) Appointment of Counsel. The court may appoint counsel to represent the defendant under this rule. The factors to be considered by the court in making this determination include: the adversary nature of the proceeding, the complexity of the proceeding, the complexity of the claims presented, the defendant's apparent level of intelligence and education, the need for an evidentiary hearing, and the need for substantial legal research.

(8) Disposition by Evidentiary Hearing.

(A) If an evidentiary hearing is required, the court shall grant a prompt hearing and shall cause notice to be served on the state attorney and the defendant or defendant's counsel, and shall determine the issues, and make findings of fact and conclusions of law with respect thereto.

(B) At an evidentiary hearing, the defendant shall have the burden of presenting evidence and the burden of proof in support of his or her motion, unless otherwise provided by law.

(C) The order issued after the evidentiary hearing shall resolve all the claims raised in the motion and shall be considered the final order for purposes of appeal.

(g) Defendant's Presence Not Required. The defendant's presence shall not be required at any hearing or conference held under this rule except at the evidentiary hearing on the merits of any claim.

(h) Successive Motions.

(1) A second or successive motion must be titled: "Second or Successive Motion for Postconviction Relief."

(2) A second or successive motion is an extraordinary pleading. Accordingly, a court may dismiss a second or successive motion if the court finds that it fails to allege new or different grounds for relief and the prior determination was on the merits or, if new and different grounds are alleged, the judge finds that the failure of the defendant or the attorney to assert those grounds in a prior motion constituted an abuse of the procedure or there was no

good cause for the failure of the defendant or defendant's counsel to have asserted those grounds in a prior motion. When a motion is dismissed under this subdivision, a copy of that portion of the files and records necessary to support the court's ruling shall accompany the order denying the motion.

(i) Service on Parties. The clerk of the court shall promptly serve on the parties a copy of any order entered under this rule, noting thereon the date of service by an appropriate certificate of service.

(j) Rehearing. Any party may file a motion for rehearing of any order addressing a motion under this rule within 15 days of the date of service of the order. A motion for rehearing is not required to preserve any issue for review in the appellate court. A timely filed motion for rehearing shall toll finality of any final order addressing a motion under this rule. A motion for rehearing must be based on a good faith belief that the court has overlooked a previously argued issue of fact or law or an argument based on a legal precedent or statute not available prior to the court's ruling. A response may be filed within 10 days of service of the motion. The trial court's order disposing of the motion for rehearing shall be filed within 15 days of the response but not later than 40 days from the date of the order of which rehearing is sought. If no order is filed within 40 days, the motion is deemed denied.

(k) Appeals. An appeal may be taken to the appropriate appellate court only from the final order disposing of the motion. All final orders denying motions for postconviction relief shall include a statement that the defendant has the right to appeal within 30 days of the rendition of the order. All nonfinal, nonappealable orders entered pursuant to subdivision (f) should include a statement that the defendant has no right to appeal the order until entry of the final order.

(l) Belated Appeals and Discretionary Review. Pursuant to the procedures outlined in Florida Rule of Appellate Procedure 9.141, a defendant may seek a belated appeal or discretionary review.

(m) Habeas Corpus. An application for writ of habeas corpus on behalf of a prisoner who is authorized to apply for relief by motion pursuant to this rule shall not be entertained if it appears that the applicant has failed to apply for relief, by motion, to the court that sentenced the applicant or that the court has denied the applicant relief, unless it also appears that the remedy by

motion is inadequate or ineffective to test the legality of the applicant's detention.

(n) Certification of Defendant; Sanctions. No motion may be filed pursuant to this rule unless it is filed in good faith and with a reasonable belief that it is timely, has potential merit, and does not duplicate previous motions that have been disposed of by the court.

(1) By signing a motion pursuant to this rule, the defendant certifies that: the defendant has read the motion or that it has been read to the defendant and that the defendant understands its content; the motion is filed in good faith and with a reasonable belief that it is timely filed, has potential merit, and does not duplicate previous motions that have been disposed of by the court; and, the facts contained in the motion are true and correct.

(2) The defendant shall either certify that the defendant can understand English or, if the defendant cannot understand English, that the defendant has had the motion translated completely into a language that the defendant understands. The motion shall contain the name and address of the person who translated the motion and that person shall certify that he or she provided an accurate and complete translation to the defendant. Failure to include this information and certification in a motion shall be grounds for the entry of an order dismissing the motion pursuant to subdivision (f)(1), (f)(2), or (f)(3).

(3) Conduct prohibited under this rule includes, but is not limited to, the following: the filing of frivolous or malicious claims; the filing of any motion in bad faith or with reckless disregard for the truth; the filing of an application for habeas corpus subject to dismissal pursuant to subdivision (m); the willful violation of any provision of this rule; and the abuse of the legal process or procedures governed by this rule.

The court, upon its own motion or on the motion of a party, may determine whether a motion has been filed in violation of this rule. The court shall issue an order setting forth the facts indicating that the defendant has or may have engaged in prohibited conduct. The order shall direct the defendant to show cause, within a reasonable time limit set by the court, why the court should not find that the defendant has engaged in prohibited conduct under this rule and impose an appropriate sanction. Following the issuance of the order to

show cause and the filing of any response by the defendant, and after such further hearing as the court may deem appropriate, the court shall make a final determination of whether the defendant engaged in prohibited conduct under this subsection.

(4) If the court finds by the greater weight of the evidence that the defendant has engaged in prohibited conduct under this rule, the court may impose one or more sanctions, including:

- (A) contempt as otherwise provided by law;
- (B) assessing the costs of the proceeding against the defendant;
- (C) dismissal with prejudice of the defendant's motion;
- (D) prohibiting the filing of further pro se motions under this rule and directing the clerk of court to summarily reject any further pro se motion under this rule;
- (E) requiring that any further motions under this rule be signed by a member in good standing of The Florida Bar, who shall certify that there is a good faith basis for each claim asserted in the motion; and/or
- (F) if the defendant is a prisoner, a certified copy of the order be forwarded to the appropriate institution or facility for consideration of disciplinary action against the defendant, including forfeiture of gain time pursuant to Chapter 944, Florida Statutes.

(5) If the court determines there is probable cause to believe that a sworn motion contains a false statement of fact constituting perjury, the court may refer the matter to the state attorney.

Committee Notes

1972 Amendment. Same as prior rule. Former rule 3.860, previously deleted, now found in article 18, The Florida Bar Integration Rules.

1977 Amendment. Nothing has been taken from proposed rule 3.850. Additions have been made. The committee proceeded on the theory that generally the motions coming under the purview of the rule were filed by prisoners and will be considered ex parte.

The proposed amendment contemplates that in those cases where the trial court found the movant

entitled to some relief, the state attorney would be noticed and given an opportunity to be heard. The rule further contemplates that if the appellate court reverses, it would do so with directions to conduct a hearing with notice to all parties.

(a), (b), (c), (d), (e)

The committee was of the opinion that the motion should contain the minimum prerequisites indicated in the lettered portions to permit the trial court to quickly ascertain whether or not the motion was entitled to consideration and, if not, provide for its return to the movant as unacceptable. This procedure is similar to federal rules dealing with postconviction motions.

The committee perceives that denial of a motion will either be based on the insufficiency of the motion itself or on the basis of the file or record which the trial court will have before it. The proposal provides for a simplified expeditious disposition of appeals in such cases. It is to be noted, however, that in those cases where the record is relied on as a basis for denial of the motion, it may in exceptional cases involve a substantial record, but the advantages of this procedure seem to justify coping with the unusual or exceptional case. It is the opinion of the committee that, in any order of denial based on the insufficiency of the motion or on the face of the record, trial courts will set forth specifically the basis of the court's ruling with sufficient specificity to delineate the issue for the benefit of appellate courts.

The committee thought that the provision permitting ex parte denial of a motion based on the face of the record was appropriate inasmuch as the movant was granted an opportunity for rehearing in which to point out any errors the court may have made, thus providing sufficient safeguards to ensure consideration of the prisoner's contentions.

The prisoner or movant's motion for rehearing will be a part of the record on appeal, thereby alerting the appellate court to the movant's dissatisfaction with the trial court's ruling.

1984 Amendment. The committee felt that provisions should be added to allow the court to consider why a subsequent motion was being filed and whether it was properly filed, similar to Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 9(b) or 35.

The committee also felt that the court should have the authority to order the state to respond to a 3.850 motion by answer or other pleading as the court may direct.

The committee felt that even if a motion filed under rule 3.850 does not substantially comply with the requirements of the rule, the motion should still be filed and ruled on by the court. Hence the former provision authorizing the court to refuse to receive such a nonconforming motion has been removed and words allowing the presiding judge to summarily deny a noncomplying motion have been satisfied.

1992 Amendment. Pursuant to *State v. District Court of Appeal of Florida*, First District, 569 So.2d 439 (Fla. 1990), motions seeking a belated direct appeal based on the ineffective assistance of counsel should be filed in the trial court under rule 3.850. Also, see rule 3.111(e) regarding trial counsel's duties before withdrawal after judgment and sentence.

1993 Amendment. This amendment is necessary to make this rule consistent with rule 3.851.

Court Commentary

1996 Court Commentary. Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.071(b) allows for telephonic and teleconferencing communication equipment to be utilized "for a motion hearing, a pretrial conference, or a status conference." Teleconferencing sites have been established by the Department of Management Services, Division of Communications at various metropolitan locations in the state. The "Shevin Study"¹ examined, at this Court's request, the issue of delays in capital postconviction relief proceedings and noted that travel problems of counsel cause part of those delays. The Court strongly encourages the use of the new telephonic

and teleconferencing technology for postconviction relief proceedings that do not require evidentiary hearings.

¹Letter from Robert L. Shevin “Re: Study of the Capital Collateral Representative” to Chief Justice Stephen H. Grimes (Feb. 26, 1996) (on file with the Supreme Court of Florida in No. 87,688).

2013 Amendment.

Rule 3.850 has been revised to address several issues identified by the Postconviction Rules Workgroup in 2006 and by the Criminal Court Steering Committee and the Subcommittee on Postconviction Relief in 2011.

Rule 3.850(d). New subdivision (d) is derived from the final two sentences formerly contained in subdivision (c).

Rule 3.850(e). Subdivision (e) was added to codify existing case law on amendments to postconviction motions and to comport with subdivision (f).

Rule 3.850(f). Subdivision (f) attempts to set out each of the different options that a trial judge has when considering a motion under this rule. It reflects the timeframe requirement of subdivision (b) and codifies existing case law regarding timely but facially insufficient motions, partial orders of denial, and the appointment of counsel. *See, e.g., Spera v. State*, 971 So. 2d 754 (Fla. 2007).

Rule 3.850(g). Subdivision (g) was previously contained in subdivision (e), but the language is largely derived from rule 3.851(c)(3).

Rule 3.850(h). Subdivision (h), formerly rule 3.850(f), was substantially rewritten.

Rule 3.850(i). Subdivision (i) is substantially the same as former subdivision (g).

Rule 3.850(j). Subdivision (j) allows both the state and the defendant the right to rehearing and is intended to allow the court to correct an obvious error without the expense and delay of a state appeal. *See King v. State*, 870 So. 2d 69 (Fla. 2d DCA 2003). The statement regarding finality is consistent with Florida Rule of Appellate Procedure 9.020(i) and is intended to clarify the date of rendition of the final order disposing of any motion under this rule.

Rule 3.850(k). Subdivision (k), formerly rule 3.850(i), was substantially rewritten to simplify the review process in both the trial and appellate courts and to provide for the efficient disposition of all claims in both courts. The requirement of a statement indicating whether the order is a nonfinal or final order subject to appeal is intended to ensure that all claims will be disposed of by the trial court and addressed in a single appeal.

Rule 3.850(l). Subdivision (l), formerly rule 3.850(j), reflects the consolidation of the subdivision with former rule 3.850(k).

Rule 3.850(n). Subdivision (n) is a substantial rewrite of former subdivision (m).

RULE 3.851. COLLATERAL RELIEF AFTER DEATH SENTENCE HAS BEEN IMPOSED AND AFFIRMED ON DIRECT APPEAL

(a) Scope. This rule shall apply to all postconviction proceedings that commence upon issuance of the appellate mandate affirming the death sentence to include all motions and petitions for any type of postconviction or collateral