

September 25, 2026

No. 1-24-1950

NOTICE: This order was filed under Supreme Court Rule 23 and is not precedent except in the limited circumstances allowed under Rule 23(e)(1).

IN THE
APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS
FIRST DISTRICT

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS,	)	Appeal from the Circuit Court
	)	of Cook County.
Plaintiff-Appellee,	)	
	)	
v.	)	No. 20 CR 8760
	)	
BENJAMIN REESE,	)	Honorable
	)	Ursula Walowski,
Defendant-Appellant.	)	Judge, presiding.

JUSTICE C.A. WALKER delivered the judgment of the court.
Presiding Justice Oden Johnson and Justice Mikva concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 **Held:** We affirm defendant's conviction for first degree murder with discharge of a firearm because the circuit court did not err in admitting certain prior inconsistent statements by an eyewitness for substantive purposes, and the evidence was sufficient to sustain the conviction.

¶ 2 Following a jury trial, defendant-appellant Benjamin Reese was found guilty of first degree murder with discharge of a firearm of victim Montrell Lee, and sentenced to 45 years' imprisonment. He appeals, arguing certain statements by the sole eyewitness called by the State at trial, Venus Wilson, should not have been admitted as prior inconsistent statements, an error that caused him prejudicial harm. He also challenges the sufficiency of the evidence, contending that even if the earlier statements from Wilson, in which she identified him as the shooter, were admissible, they were insufficient to sustain the verdict because Wilson was a drug addict and thus incredible as a witness, and the State did not introduce any significant additional evidence. For the reasons below, we affirm.

¶ 3 BACKGROUND

¶ 4 Reese was arrested on August 25, 2020, and was ultimately charged via indictment with eight counts, including count V for first degree murder (720 ILCS 5/9-1(a)(1) (West Supp. 2019), following an incident on August 13, 2020.

¶ 5 Trial began on March 11, 2024. Chicago police officer Damon Goodloe testified that on August 13, 2020, he was on patrol with his partner Officer Louis Monae when they received a call at approximately 11:40 p.m. for "a person shot" and "auto accident" in the same area. They responded to a location near 108th Place in Chicago. When they arrived, they saw a vehicle that had "crashed on the curb," and a man they later identified as Lee seated in the driver's seat. He was bleeding and unresponsive, and the officers called an ambulance. Two other individuals were standing near the vehicle, who proved unhelpful in relaying to the officers what happened. Goodloe wore a body-worn camera that day, and the circuit court permitted the State to publish the footage to the jury.

¶ 6 The body-worn camera video, included in the record on appeal, depicts the events consistent with Goodloe's testimony. Additionally, at some point, Goodloe asks a man standing near the vehicle what he knows, and the man responds that he does not know anything, though he does relay Lee's name. We note the video was played in the State's case-in-chief without audio, but later played with audio during Reese's case.

¶ 7 On cross-examination, Goodloe stated they arrived no more than five minutes after receiving the initial call. He did not observe any weapons or cartridges near the vehicle.

¶ 8 Venus Wilson testified that she lived in a house on the 1000 block of West 108th Place. She lived with Ronaldo Dase, her fiancé and Reese's uncle. Wilson identified Reese in court. She had known Reese for ten years at the time of trial. On August 13, 2020, Wilson resided at the house, but Dase was incarcerated. That night, she was at home at approximately 11:30 p.m. when she went outside to take out the garbage. Outside, in the alley, Wilson saw Reese and her neighbor, who she knew as "Skip," washing a vehicle behind Skip's house. While she was outside, another vehicle entered the alley. Lee, whom Wilson knew, drove the vehicle, and had two passengers with him. Lee said hello to Wilson using her nickname "Rusty." The prosecutor asked Wilson "And so where was the defendant and Skip when that car pulled up," to which she responded, "They was outside. Skip was washing his – drying his car. They was doing something out there. I can't remember. My stomach is hurting." She declined to take a break, but agreed she did not want to be in court, and was present because she was subpoenaed.

¶ 9 Wilson continued, initially stating she could not remember if Reese said anything to Lee, but acknowledging she heard Lee call Reese a "little boy." In response to the question, "And what did [Reese] say?," Wilson answered, "Nothing. He just – they just left, I guess. I don't know what happened. My stomach hurts." She agreed that Reese told Lee to "go ahead." Wilson then left to

go back inside. She “turned around, going in the house and then [] heard shots.” Wilson turned back around and saw the shots were coming from the alley. When asked who was firing the shots, she responded:

“[Lee], he carries guns in his car. Right there, I don’t know who did it. I can’t remember. It’s not that I can’t remember. I just telling you – when I was trying to tell the officers and the stuff, all of that, they weren’t paying me no attention. They just did what they wanted to do let the case just close up because the man was ready to retire. And I could never talk to nobody else no more but one time.”

¶ 10 She continued that when she turned around, Reese was still in the alley, but Lee’s vehicle was gone. Wilson could not remember if Reese called her the night of August 13 after the shooting, and also could not recall testifying before the grand jury that Reese called her after the shooting and told her “don’t say nothing.” The prosecutor impeached Wilson with her grand jury transcript, which reflected she did so testify.

¶ 11 It was not until August 15 that Wilson spoke to police officers about the incident. On that date, Chicago police detectives Jeffrey Rodenberg and William Levigne came to her home then drove her to the police station, where she provided a video-recorded statement. She responded to the question, “But you agreed to give a video-record statement; correct” with “Did I? Was it a video? I can’t remember. Some things I can’t remember.”

¶ 12 The prosecutor asked Wilson a series of questions on whether she made specific comments during her video-recorded statement. In response to whether she stated that Reese said to Lee, “you know who the f*** this is,” Wilson stated, “Yeah, I did say that, but it was just—I was probably high or something. I don’t know what it was.” She also agreed she told the detectives Lee asked Reese, “how you been man? You been a good boy[?],” to which Reese responded to “get the f***

on.” Wilson denied, however, stating that she saw Reese pull out a firearm and begin shooting, responding to the question at trial, “No. They asked me did he have a gun. And I told them, no, the police took his gun. And that was when him and [Dase] was together.” The prosecutor continued, “[D]id you tell the detectives that the defendant shot a gun. It was just like the movie and [he] shot right there,” and Wilson responded, “I said—did I say it? Yes, I will say – but like I said, I don’t know who gun it was because they had guns on the platform right there.” When asked if she told the detectives Reese fired more than three times, she said, “I don’t know what I said. If I said it, okay. But I am not – I need to get through this.” Wilson also denied that she told the detectives she saw Reese shoot at Lee’s vehicle, testifying, “No, I said in the air if he did. I said like this (indicating) in the air. Those other boys was in their car. I don’t know who shot who – what. I really don’t.”

¶ 13 The prosecutor shifted to questions regarding Wilson’s testimony before the grand jury. Wilson agreed that the state’s attorney’s office assisted her with housing from August 16 to 26 by paying for a hotel room, and on the 26th, she testified before the grand jury. Wilson swore to tell the truth before her grand jury testimony. She agreed that she testified before the grand jury that her nickname was Rusty and about the “good boy” exchange between Lee and Reese. She then responded that she could not remember to a series of additional questions about her grand jury testimony, including whether she testified that (1) she saw Reese shoot into Lee’s vehicle as Lee drove away; (2) she believed the shots must have contacted Lee because of the way Reese shot towards the vehicle; (3) Lee’s vehicle then went down the street and “must have hit something,” at which time Reese entered his vehicle and drove away; (4) Reese had a “problem” with Lee, but she did not know why; (5) it was condescending for Lee to refer to Reese as “boy”; (6) the firearm she saw Reese discharge was black with an extended clip; (7) Reese fired more than three times;

and (8) no one else involved in the incident had a firearm. During these trial exchanges, the prosecutor read verbatim from Wilson's grand jury testimony when posing her questions about whether she remembered particular passages of the grand jury testimony.

¶ 14 Wilson confirmed that the day after the shooting, Dase called her from prison. She knew all calls from prison were recorded. The prosecutor then asked Wilson a series of questions about the August 14 call between her and Dase, with Wilson again answering she could not remember to a series of propositions respecting the phone conversation, including that (1) she told Dase that immediately before the shooting, Reese told Lee to "push the f*** on"; (2) Dase asked if Reese shot Lee, and Wilson responded "okay"; (3) Lee crashed into a pole down the alley after the shooting; and (4) Reese called her after the shooting and said "Don't say f***. Shut the f*** up."

¶ 15 On cross-examination, Wilson testified that she took her "medication" before court that morning. She knew Lee because he sold her crack cocaine (crack), which she has used for multiple years. When she went outside to take out the garbage and saw Skip and Reese, Reese was inside Skip's garage, and Wilson joined Reese there while Skip remained outside washing the vehicle. She reiterated she did not see Reese shoot Lee. Following the incident, she agreed "some people" had threatened her, claiming she had "set [Lee] up."

¶ 16 Wilson also testified about her history of drug use on cross-examination. Specifically, she confirmed that she used crack on August 13, 2020, before the incident occurred. Additionally, before the detectives arrived at her home on August 15, she had also used crack. Every day between August 15 and her grand jury testimony on August 26, Wilson continued to use crack, and she used crack "all night" on August 25 just prior to the grand jury testimony. She agreed that some of things she said to the grand jury were not true, as was the case with some of the things she said in her video-recorded statement.

¶ 17 Regarding the circumstances of her video-recorded statement, she testified that at the station, the detectives told her she “was going to go to jail *** because they got *** witnesses saying *** that I was out there and that [Reese] had did what he did.” A couple of hours after she returned home from the police station on August 15, her “house got shot up” while she was inside. This prompted the state’s attorney’s office to assist her with housing. Wilson continued, “and I said things because I was afraid for everybody. And I don’t know what I was saying, but it was what the police wanted me to say and I said it just to – just to get a peace of mind and get away.”

¶ 18 On redirect, Wilson testified that the detectives did not tell her what to say before she provided the video-record statement. She did not recall if she stated to the detectives that she was not under the influence of any drugs or alcohol at the time she made her video-recorded statement. She did recall that she “told them I don’t drink. I don’t drink alcohol because I have cirrhosis of the liver,” but she did tell them she used drugs. The prosecutor then read extensive portions of the grand jury testimony into the record, pausing periodically to ask if Wilson could recall having made the previous statement to the grand jury, to which she “I can’t remember” to passages of grand jury testimony where she confirmed that she told the detectives Reese shot Lee because that was the truth, her testimony was given freely and voluntarily, and she was not under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of testifying.

¶ 19 Outside the presence of the jury, the State requested that the circuit court allow it to publish the video-recorded statement and clips of the prison telephone call between Dase and Wilson from August 14 to the jury. The prosecutor argued, “We believe those [prison call clips] in their entirety should come in as well as the entire ERI statement of Venus Wilson should come in as well based on her testimony here today that she was under the influence of drugs; that she was told what to

say; that there was undue influence onto that witness.” Defense counsel objected, arguing the evidence was redundant and cumulative. The circuit court granted the State’s request, explaining:

“[B]ased on the testimony of Miss Wilson, she at various times said different things. She at some points testified she remembers and answered yes, a very few of those. And at most other points, she said she doesn’t remember. She also testified what I am saying now is the truth and that some of the things she said previously were not true.

The State tried to get specific with her as far as both the video statement as well as the Grand Jury statement and, once again, she was unclear on – most of the times she just said she didn’t remember. She also did say at some point that she –the police told her what to say. But then the police didn’t tell her what to say. ***

I find based on her testimony in full, including her cross-examination, the entirety of her previous statement[s] would be admissible and allowed. I do find it is relevant. I don’t find it is cumulative. And it is also relevant for purposes of the State presenting prior inconsistent statements as substantive evidence. So for those reasons, I am going to allow those previous statements in their entirety.”

¶ 20 Rodenberg testified that he was assigned Lee’s case on the morning of August 14, and was present for Wilson’s video-recorded statement. The State introduced the video of the statement into the record, and Rodenberg testified that he had reviewed the video before trial and it accurately portrayed Wilson’s statement. The circuit court then published the video to the jury, over defense counsel’s objection.

¶ 21 On the video, which appears in the record on appeal, Wilson and two men are in an interview room. When Wilson enters, she says, “Don’t close that door on me.” Rodenberg identifies himself and Chicago police detective James Maloney. Rodenberg asks the questions of Wilson during the

interview. At the outset, Wilson corrects Rodenberg regarding the address of where the incident occurred. Wilson states that she went to take out the garbage and saw Skip washing a vehicle with Reese. Lee pulled up in another vehicle. Wilson knew Lee through “drugs.” Lee and Reese had an interaction, though there was no argument, and Reese simply told Lee “to get the f*** on.” Lee first asked if Reese “had been a good boy.” Shortly after this exchange, Wilson said “it was like a movie, he just started bang bang.” Wilson did not know how many shots Reese fired, but it was “more than three.” Reese shot “at” Lee’s vehicle. Wilson believed Reese did not like the questions Lee asked him. There were two other people Wilson did not know in Lee’s vehicle. Rodenberg asked if she had spoken to Reese after the incident, but Wilson’s response is inaudible. Wilson affirmed the detectives treated her decently, she was not threatened or promised anything, she gave the statement voluntarily, and she was not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. She concluded with, “I wish this never happened.”

¶ 22 Rodenberg further testified that after Wilson made her video-recorded statement, she provided the detectives with Reese’s cell phone number.

¶ 23 On cross-examination, Rodenberg acknowledged that Levigne was the lead detective at the time Reese was arrested, and had since retired. They never spoke to Skip during the investigation, despite Rodenberg going to his house repeatedly. They did speak to the two passengers in Lee’s vehicle, who “gave a general account of what happened,” but could not identify the shooter. One of the passengers viewed a photo array that contained Reese’s photo. Officers did not recover a firearm in connection with the case and did not test Reese for gunshot residue (GSR). He acknowledged there were several 911 calls related to the gunshots on August 13, but investigation of those calls did not yield any additional witnesses. The witnesses to the vehicle crash were also

not useful to the investigation because the alley where the shooting apparently occurred was not visible from the location of the crash.

¶ 24 Kimberly Hofsteadter, an investigator for the Cook County Sheriff's Department, testified that she provides jail records to the state's attorney's office, including recordings of telephone calls, as part of her job. She identified People's Exhibit Number 13 as a recording of the call from Dase to Wilson on August 14, 2020. The circuit court published the recording to the jury over defense counsel's objection.

¶ 25 On the recording, included in the record on appeal, Wilson says it was not a good morning for her because Lee "got killed last night and they are trying to say I set him up." Wilson continues that Reese was outside washing a vehicle when Lee pulled up. Reese told him to "push on," and Lee did not. Dase asks "Ben shot him?" and Wilson says "Okay." Wilson says she is "scared as h***." She asks if she should leave the area, and Dase says he does not know. Wilson denies she had anything to do with the shooting, and insists Lee came to the alley on his own. She says Skip could have set it up. She denies anyone hit each other or there was an argument. Wilson insists "I was right there when it happened," referring to the shooting. It "stunned" her. She denies she had spoken to Reese, but then says someone called her and said "Don't say f***, don't say f***, shut the f*** up." Skip would not answer her phone calls. Dase again asks, "What did you call [Lee] for," and Wilson loudly and repeatedly denies that she called Lee before he appeared in the alley. At a different point in the conversation, played by the State as a separate recording, Wilson says she could not even say "Stop, nephew" during the incident.

¶ 26 Chicago police evidence technician Deann Wafer testified that she responded to the scene of Lee's shooting and recovered shell casings from the alley. She also recovered fired bullet

fragments from the scene, including a “fired bullet from the alley.” Wafer testified the shell casings displayed “several different head stamps,” and were recovered from 108th Place.

¶ 27 On cross-examination, Wafer confirmed she recovered seven total shell casings. She could not determine if the shell casings were fired from the same weapon, and agreed there could have been more than one weapon involved. Wafer did not recover any bullet fragments from inside Lee’s vehicle. On redirect, she stated no shell casings were recovered from inside the vehicle.

¶ 28 Former Assistant State’s Attorney Molly Riordan testified that while working for the state’s attorney’s office on August 26, 2020, she presented Wilson for her grand jury testimony. Before the testimony, Riordan spoke with Wilson, who was able to understand and answer questions. Wilson agreed to testify. Riordan identified People’s Exhibit No. 48 as an accurate transcript of Wilson’s grand jury testimony, and the circuit court published the transcript to the jury over defense counsel’s objection. Riordan then read portions of the testimony into the record, which demonstrated Wilson’s account before the grand jury was consistent with the questions posed by the prosecutor, as set forth *infra* ¶ 13.

¶ 29 Jeremy Bauer, a special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), testified that he was assigned to the FBI Cellular Analysis Survey Team (CAST), which provides services including mobile device location data through “historical cell site analysis.” The circuit court permitted Bauer to testify as an expert in cell site analysis. Bauer performed a cell site analysis on the phone number Wilson provided to the police as Reese’s, and found that on August 13, 2020, that phone interacted twice with a cell site “around” 10:50 p.m. consistent with the “general vicinity” of Skip’s address. The phone also interacted with a different cell tower, still in the “general vicinity,” from 11:02 p.m. to 11:34 p.m. He summarized his opinion as follows: “during

the particular timeframe around just before and just after 11 p.m. on the 13th the records would be consistent with the phone being in the vicinity” of Skip’s address.

¶ 30 Amanda Darnell, a firearm examiner for the Illinois State Police, testified that she analyzed seven “fired cartridge cases” in connection with case, and concluded they were all fired in the same firearm. She also examined two fired bullets recovered from the scene, and concluded both were fired from the same firearm. She could not conclude, however, that the bullets and shell casings were all fired from the same firearm. On cross-examination, she acknowledged multiple firearms could have been involved in the incident, and she did not examine any firearms in connection with the case.

¶ 31 The parties stipulated that Dr. Nicole R. Jackson performed Lee’s autopsy, and if called, she would testify that Lee sustained three injuries: gunshot wounds to his back and right arm, and a “red-brown abrasion.” Jackson would also testify that “the cause of death to [Lee] was gunshot wound of back and the manner of death was homicide.”

¶ 32 The State rested, and Reese moved for a directed verdict, which the circuit court denied. Reese did not call any witnesses, with the only evidence submitted in his case the aforementioned version of Goodloe’s body-worn camera footage with the sound playing audibly.

¶ 33 During the jury instruction conference, the parties acknowledged that the entirety of Wilson’s grand jury testimony was not admitted, as the State redacted certain portions that were not read into the record by Riordan. At closing arguments, the prosecutor emphasized Wilson’s call with Dase occurred the day after the incident, and that during the video-recorded statement, she looked “alert,” not like “she is high on drugs.” The prosecutor stated, “[T]his whole case *** comes down to [Wilson’s] testimony as well as some of the other evidence that we used to corroborate that testimony.” Defense counsel contended that Wilson was addicted to crack.

¶ 34 Following deliberations, the jury found Reese guilty of first-degree murder with discharge of a firearm.

¶ 35 On April 11, 2024, Reese filed a motion for judgment notwithstanding the verdict or for a new trial, arguing that Wilson was an incredible witness and as such, the evidence was insufficient to sustain the verdict. He also contended, in relevant part, that the circuit “court abused its discretion by not limiting the three prior inconsistent statements by allowing the entire grand jury transcript to be read to the jury, videotaped statement, and jail call audio to be played to the jury.” Reese amended the motion on July 29, 2024, including new allegations arising from events at an earlier court date where someone handed the circuit court clerk a letter, purportedly written by Wilson, in which she reiterated her recantation. The handwritten note purportedly from Wilson appears in the record on appeal, dated June 19, 2024, and alleges the detectives told Wilson they would “get [Dase] out of jail” in exchange for her testimony that Reese shot Lee.

¶ 36 On September 23, 2024, the circuit court denied Reese’s amended posttrial motion, and, following a hearing, sentenced Reese to 45 years’ imprisonment on count V (20 years for first degree murder and an additional 25 years for the firearm enhancement per section 5-8-1(a)(1)(d)(iii) of the Unified Code of Corrections (730 ILCS 5/5-8-1(a)(1)(d)(iii) (West Supp. 2023))). Reese filed his notice of appeal that same day.

¶ 37 JURISDICTION

¶ 38 The circuit court sentenced Reese on September 23, 2024, and he filed his notice of appeal that same day, giving this court jurisdiction pursuant to article VI, section 6, of the Illinois Constitution (Ill. Const. 1970, art. VI, § 6), and Illinois Supreme Court Rules 603 (eff. Feb. 6, 2013) and 606 (eff. Jan. 1, 2026).

¶ 39 ANALYSIS

¶ 40 On appeal, Reese argues (1) the circuit court erred by admitting three of Wilson’s prior inconsistent statements in their entirety, or nearly so in the case of the grand jury transcript, and (2) the evidence was insufficient to sustain the jury’s verdict because the State’s case depended on Wilson’s prior inconsistent statements, and she was an incredible witness due to her history of drug use. We begin with the evidentiary argument.

¶ 41 The circuit court admitted Wilson’s video-recorded statement, grand jury testimony, and August 14, 2020 phone call with Dase pursuant to section 115-10.1 of the Illinois Code of Criminal Procedure (725 ILCS 5/115-10.1 (West 2022)). Pursuant to that section,

“[E]vidence of a statement made by a witness is not made inadmissible by the hearsay rule if:

- (a) the statement is inconsistent with his testimony at the hearing of the trial, and
- (b) the witness is subject to cross-examination concerning the statement, and
- (c) the statement –

- (1) was made under oath at a trial, hearing, or other proceeding, or

- (2) narrates, describes, or explains an event or condition of which the witness had personal knowledge, and

- (A) the statement is proved to have been written or signed by the witness,

- or

- (B) the witness acknowledged under oath the making of the statement either in his testimony at the hearing or trial in which the admission into evidence of the prior statement is being sought, or at a trial, hearing, or other proceeding, or

(C) the statement is proved to have been accurately recorded by a tape recorder, videotape recording, or any other similar electronic means of sound recording.” *Id.*

Such statements may be admitted for substantive use, not only impeachment, provided the requirements of section 115-10.1 are satisfied. See *People v. Simpson*, 2015 IL 116512, ¶ 27.

¶ 42 “A witness’ prior testimony *** does not have to directly contradict testimony given at trial to be considered inconsistent within the meaning of that term set out in section 115-10.1,” and may encompass instances when a witness claims to not recall a matter. See *People v. Flores*, 128 Ill. 2d 66, 88 (1989); see also *People v. Murry*, 2025 IL App (1st) 221202, ¶¶ 98-99. A circuit court need not perform a “ ‘quantitative or mathematical analysis’ ” of which a witness’ prior inconsistent statement before admitting the entirety of the statement into evidence. See *People v. Govea*, 299 Ill. App. 3d 76, 87 (1998) (quoting *People v. Salazar*, 126 Ill. 2d 424, 456-58 (1988)); see also *People v. Castejon*, 2025 IL App (1st) 221918, ¶ 46. The decision whether to admit a prior inconsistent statement as substantive evidence per section 115-10.1 (and how much of it to admit) is within a circuit court’s discretion, and will not be reversed absent an abuse of discretion. *Flores*, 128 Ill. 2d at 87-88. “An abuse of discretion occurs when the ruling is arbitrary, fanciful, or unreasonable, or no reasonable person would adopt the court’s view.” *People v. Heintz*, 2026 IL 131340, ¶ 37.

¶ 43 The State submitted three prior inconsistent statements of Wilson’s into the record at trial: her phone call with Dase, recorded because it was made while Dase was in prison, from August 14, 2020; her video-recorded statement provided to the detectives on August 15, 2020; and her grand jury testimony from August 26, 2020. In each statement, Wilson identified Reese as the shooter. She also described the details of the shooting in a consistent matter across all three

statements. At trial, however, Wilson testified that she could not recall the details of the shooting itself but never saw Reese discharge a firearm. The State questioned Wilson about each of the statements individually. Respecting each statement, Wilson testified that she could recall relaying (either to Dase, the detectives, or the grand jury) the surrounding details of August 13, 2020 leading up to the shooting, including that she saw Reese with Skip in the alley just before the shooting, and that she was present when Lee drove to the alley and had a verbal exchange with Reese. Wilson, however, also testified that she could not recall making the statements incriminating Reese in any of the three prior inconsistent statements. She also maintained she was under the influence of drugs when giving her video-recorded statement and grand jury testimony. On the State's motions, the court admitted each statement in full (with the grand jury testimony caveat noted above), explaining that Wilson's claimed memory loss and equivocal testimony at trial about each of the statements necessitated the jury reviewing the full context of each statement.

¶ 44 On this record, we find the circuit court did not abuse its discretion by admitting any of the three contested prior inconsistent statements in full or near-full form. As a threshold matter, we note that each met all required elements of section 115-10.1 for potential admissibility as substantive evidence. In the video-recorded statement, Wilson identified Reese as Lee's shooter, maintained she witnessed the shooting itself, and stated she was not under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of recording. Accordingly, (1) the statement was inconsistent with Wilson's account at trial that she did not see who fired the shots, per section 115-10.1(a); (2) Wilson was available for cross-examination at trial, per section 115-10-1(b); and (3) the statement narrated events which Wilson had personal knowledge of and was recorded by "videotape," per section 115-10.1(c)(2)(C). Likewise, the phone call met each of the same elements, as it was recorded by the prison. Finally, the grand jury statement met all required elements because it was made under

oath in front of the grand jury, per section 115-10.1(c)(1). See 725 ILCS 5/115-10.1(a), (b) (c)(1), (c)(2)(C) (West 2022).

¶ 45 Reese argues that none of the statements was sufficiently “inconsistent,” in its entirety, to justify admission in full. Thus, he contends, the circuit court should have admitted only those portions that Wilson either testified she could not recall or directly contradicted at trial. We disagree because it is within a court’s discretion to admit that portion of the prior inconsistent statement that is necessary given the witness’s in-court testimony. See *Castejon*, 2025 IL App (1st) 221918, ¶ 46 (citing *Salazar*, 126 Ill. 2d at 456-58). The trial transcript demonstrates that while Wilson confirmed the surrounding details, she insisted she did not see Reese shoot Lee, and either denied or testified she could not recall when confronted with comments to the contrary. Thus, while certain aspects of Wilson’s in-court testimony did not contradict aspects of the three prior inconsistent statements, she uniformly either outright contradicted or claimed she could not recall regarding the most important aspects of each prior inconsistent statement. The circuit court was not required to go through each statement and delineate only those portions that Wilson specifically contradicted at trial, particularly where she equivocated so frequently on the stand (as detailed in the background section). *Id.* Instead, under these circumstances, a reasonable court could conclude that the jury would be best served by considering Wilson’s three prior inconsistent statements in their full context, thus able to appreciate where she did and did not waver at trial and make a conclusion about which of her versions to credit based on the full breadth of her commentary on the incident.

¶ 46 This is especially true when Wilson herself claimed her past statements were unreliable because of drug use. Her demeanor in the video-recorded statement, and consistency and clarity of her accounts as reflected in the other statements, take on heightened relevance to the jury’s

credibility determination of Wilson given this context. As the parties acknowledge, the case rested on the jury's judgment of Wilson's credibility; providing the jury with all appropriate, admissible evidence that could aid it in that assessment was a reasonable position for circuit court to adopt, and thus not subject to reversal on abuse of discretion review. *Heintz*, 2026 IL 131340, ¶ 37.

¶ 47 Reese also argues, specific to the grand jury testimony, that it was unnecessary to admit the transcript into evidence via Riordan after the prosecutor had asked Wilson at length about the majority of the individual statements in the grand jury transcript on cross-examination. The record supports Reese's contention that the admission of the transcript caused the jury to again hear statements which the prosecutor had already read to Wilson in the form of a series of impeachment questions, each styled in the, "Were you asked this question and did you provide this response" form. Reese is also correct that Illinois courts have found under certain circumstances, admitting entire grand jury transcripts can constitute an abuse of discretion. See *People v. Radovick*, 275 Ill. App. 3d 809, 820-22 (1995). But we find, due to the consistent evasiveness of Wilson's answers at trial and the disjointed nature of the grand jury testimony being introduced through cross-examination, it was not unreasonable for the circuit court to conclude the jury would benefit from hearing the grand jury testimony as a narrative, without the intervening questions to Wilson. While another court may have concluded that Riordan's reading was cumulative, the court's decision here was not so unreasonable that we can find it constituted an abuse of discretion, given the centrality of Wilson's credibility to the case's resolution. See *People v. Morgan*, 2025 IL 130626, ¶ 23 (In a review for abuse of discretion, the "inquiry, under this most deferential standard, is not whether the reviewing court would have made the same decision if it were acting as the circuit court.").

¶ 48 Reese also argues, specific to the August 14 call from Dase, that portions of the call were confusing and thus prejudicial because Dase and Wilson’s statements could be difficult to hear at times, Wilson appeared agitated, and she discussed her fear that others suspected she was involved in Lee’s shooting. This argument fails because, as explained above, Wilson’s professed lack of knowledge about the shooting itself and her contact with Reese after the fact are relevant to her credibility and directly contradicted by the phone call, and the context within which she made these statements could reasonably be considered necessary to assess the call’s evidentiary value against her in-court testimony, even if Wilson at times veers off topic during the admitted portions of the call. *Id.*

¶ 49 Reese’s final claim on appeal is that the evidence was insufficient to sustain the verdict because Wilson’s three prior inconsistent statements were the only evidence identifying him as the shooter, and these accounts should be deemed unreliable due to Wilson’s history of drug use.

¶ 50 When considering a challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence, the reviewing court will construe the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, and determine whether any rational trier of fact could have found the prosecution established the essential elements of the charge beyond a reasonable doubt. *People v. Johnson*, 2026 IL 131337, ¶ 59. It is the factfinder’s responsibility to weigh the evidence, assess witness credibility, and draw reasonable inferences from the evidence, and the reviewing court will not substitute its judgment for that of the factfinder on issues of witness credibility or evidentiary weight. *People v. Sauls*, 2022 IL 127732, ¶ 52. “The positive, credible testimony of a single witness, even if contradicted by the defendant, is sufficient to convict a defendant.” *Id.* We will not reverse a conviction based on insufficient evidence unless the evidence is so “unreasonable, improbable, or unsatisfactory that it justifies a reasonable doubt of the defendant’s guilt.” *Id.*

¶ 51 This case hinges on the jury’s determination of Wilson’s credibility, both on the stand and in providing her three earlier statements. While this court generally must defer to a factfinder’s credibility determinations, this deference is not absolute, as that assessment is “not conclusive and does not bind the reviewing court.” *People v. Gray*, 2017 IL 120958, ¶ 35. Specific to this context, Illinois law maintains that, “[w]here the finding of the defendant’s guilt depends on eyewitness testimony, a reviewing court must decide whether the fact-finder could reasonably accept the testimony as true beyond a reasonable doubt.” *Id.* ¶ 36. The reviewing court should only discount the eyewitness’ testimony “where the record evidence compels the conclusion that no reasonable person could accept it beyond a reasonable doubt.” *People v. Cunningham*, 212 Ill. 2d 274, 279 (2004). We must also consider that at trial, Wilson recanted her previous statements identifying Reese as the shooter. In Illinois, “recantation testimony is regarded as inherently unreliable.” *People v. Sanders*, 2016 IL 118123, ¶ 33.

¶ 52 Reese’s primary argument is that Wilson’s three prior inconsistent statements identifying him as the shooter could not be reasonably credited because of her admitted history of drug abuse, including her purported crack usage immediately before the incident, and her claim to have been under the influence of crack during both her video-recorded statement and grand jury testimony. A witness’ history of drug use is relevant to the assessment of their credibility, but is not determinative, and a factfinder is not required to discount a witness’ testimony because they admitted to prior drug use. See *People v. Morrow*, 303 Ill. App. 3d 671, 677-78 (1999) (citing *People v. Steidl*, 142 Ill. 2d 204, 227 (1991)). The Illinois Supreme Court emphasized that the “testimony of a narcotics addict is to be reviewed with great caution, since the fact of his addiction to narcotics has an important bearing on his credibility.” *People v. Dade*, 109 Ill. App. 2d 337, 341 (1969).

¶ 53 We find the jury could reasonably credit Wilson’s three prior inconsistent statements as relaying the accurate version of events, and thus the evidence was sufficient to sustain the verdict against Reese. This case presents a convergence of two long-held maxims in this area of criminal law—a conviction may be supported by the testimony of a single eyewitness if credible, and a reviewing court must defer to the factfinder on matters of witness credibility. See *Sauls*, 2022 IL 127732, ¶ 52. Given these well-accepted principles, we will not reverse the jury’s decision to credit Wilson’s earlier statements and base their verdict on those statements, despite the understandable misgivings one might have about Wilson’s credibility due to her history of drug abuse, recantation, and evasive testimony at trial.

¶ 54 The key issue with Reese’s claim is that the jury heard evidence both supporting and detracting from Wilson’s status as a credible witness, and came to its own conclusion giving that conflicting evidence. Wilson admitted on the stand to a history of drug use, and claimed she was under the influence when she witnessed the incident, provided her video-recorded statement, and testified before the grand jury. But the record does not end there. Instead, the record also contained the video-recorded statement itself, on which the viewer, the members of the jury and this court included, can scrutinize her demeanor and decide whether she was speaking credibly, or was potentially in a compromised mental state. The record also contains, crucially, the August 14 recording of the phone call between Wilson and Dase, during which Wilson told Dase the same thing she told the detectives, which was also the same thing she testified to before the grand jury—that she witnessed Reese, who she had known for 10 years, shoot Lee. The call predated any alleged law enforcement pressure on Wilson. A reasonable jury could take this full universe of information and conclude Wilson was telling the truth across her three earlier statements, but then decided to recant at trial. This last point is also worth emphasizing, as Illinois law is clear that a

factfinder may reject recanted testimony because it is considered “inherently unreliable.” See *Sanders*, 2016 IL 118123, ¶ 33.

¶ 55 Reese relies on *People v. Bazemore*, 25 Ill. 2d 74 (1962), where the testimony of a narcotics addict, accepted at trial, was deemed too unreliable on appeal. *Bazemore* does not alter the outcome here, however, because there the court’s decision involved not just the fact of the witness’ addiction, but also the witness’ established incentive to falsify testimony. See *Bazemore*, 25 Ill. 2d at 76-78. Specifically, the witness at issue was a confidential informant that the police officers assisted financially, a fact the *Bazemore* court emphasized in its inclusion that he was incredible—“in looking to his motives for acting as an informer, we cannot help but take particular cognizance that he was being ‘loaned’ money by one of the officers.” *Id.* at 78. Such an incentive is lacking here, especially as concerns the prison phone call with Dase and the video-recorded statement, both of which occurred before any housing assistance to Wilson from the State.

¶ 56 Reese also emphasizes the lack of physical evidence (including a firearm), GSR evidence, or other witnesses, and argues Wilson is not the type of witness whose identification alone can support a conviction, despite the general principle that a conviction can be based on the eyewitness testimony of a single credible witness. See *Sauls*, 2022 IL 127732, ¶ 52. Given the other aspects of the record discussed above, we find Wilson’s alleged drug use is not enough on its own to reverse the jury’s credibility determination, particularly in light of the two criminal law maxims referenced above. Moreover, Reese’s argument on this point overstates the purported dearth of additional evidence in the record. While it is true the State could not produce the firearm or additional eyewitnesses, it did introduce cell phone data to support the proposition that Reese was in the area at the time of the shooting. Additionally, shell casings and bullets were recovered from locations consistent with the shooting occurring in the alley near Wilson’s and Skip’s homes,

consistent with Wilson's description of the shooting in the three prior inconsistent statements. Thus, while the jury would have been within its rights to credit Wilson's account in the three prior inconsistent statements without additional corroboration, such corroboration did exist in the record to some degree.

¶ 57

CONCLUSION

¶ 58 The circuit court did not err in admitting Wilson's three prior inconsistent statements in their (near) entirety, and the evidence was sufficient to support the jury's verdict. Accordingly, we affirm Reese's conviction.

¶ 59 Affirmed.