2026 IL App (1st) 252579-U
No. 1-25-2579
Order filed November 16, 2026

NOTICE: This order was filed under Illinois Supreme Court Rule 23(b) and is not precedential except in the limited circumstances allowed under Rule 23(e)(1).

IN THE

APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS

FIRST DISTRICT

THIRD DIVISION

In re J.F., a Minor

(THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, Petitioner-Appellee,

v.

J.F., Respondent-Appellant).

Appeal from the Circuit Court of Cook County.
Honorable Cynthia Ramirez, Judge, Presiding.
No. 23 JD 427

JUSTICE LAMPKIN delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Rochford and Rice concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held*: The evidence was sufficient to sustain the jury's guilty findings as they related to the allegations of first degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm, and armed robbery. Affirmed.

¶ 2 On March 7, 2023, the State filed a petition for adjudication of wardship alleging that then-14-year-old respondent J.F. committed first degree murder, attempt first degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm, and armed robbery. Specifically, the petition alleged that respondent shot

and killed Devsish[1] Nandepu, shot Charan Koppala, and participated in the armed robbery of Nandepu, Koppala, and Lakshman Gogada. Following a trial, a jury found respondent guilty of the first degree murder of Nandepu, aggravated battery with a firearm of Koppala, and armed robbery.

¶ 3 On appeal, respondent asks us to reverse the jury's verdict, arguing that the evidence did not sufficiently establish that he participated in the shooting of Nandepu and Koppala and the robbery.

¶ 4 For the reasons that follow, we affirm the trial court's judgment.[2]

¶ 5 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 6 On January 25, 2025, the trial court designated respondent's case as an extended juvenile jurisdiction prosecution. See 705 ILCS 405/5-810 (West 2024).

¶ 7 Respondent's jury trial commenced on October 22, 2025. Gogada testified that he moved to the United States on December 18, 2022, and that he briefly stayed with a friend before visiting other friends in Kansas City. He returned to Chicago in January 2023. Nandepu's father, Srinivas Nandepu, testified that Nandepu moved to Chicago on January 9, 2023. Gogada, Nandepu, and Koppala all moved to Chicago to pursue graduate degrees. The testimony reflected that on January 22, 2023, Nandepu, Koppala, and Gogada decided to go to Walmart to purchase an internet router for their new apartment. At approximately 6 p.m., they took a 45-minute bus ride and got lost after exiting the bus, ending up behind a Lowe's located at the 8400 block of South Holland Road in Chicago, Illinois. Six teenagers in a stolen Kia Forte drove past the three men and stopped. One of the occupants of the Forte, a teenage boy, exited the car from one of the rear doors wearing a mask

[1]Nandepu's first name is spelled as both "Devsish" and "Devasish" at various points in the record. We have used the spelling in the charging instrument.

[2]In adherence with the requirements of Illinois Supreme Court Rule 352(a) (eff. July 1, 2018), this appeal has been resolved without oral argument upon entry of a separate written order.

and demanded that the three men surrender their wallets, phones, and any money. The teenager was armed with a handgun and pointed it at the men during the encounter. A second teenage boy exited the driver's seat of the Forte with a rifle but remained further away. As the first offender returned to the car, the second offender with the rifle fired three shots, striking both Nandepu and Koppala.

¶ 8 Gogada stated that he was primarily focused on the first offender and that he only looked at the shooter for a couple seconds. He testified that both offenders were black and seemed like they were in 8th or 9th grade. Koppala testified that he was more concerned with the offender closest to them and did not notice much about the individual with the rifle. Koppala did not see the faces of either offender, and he compared their heights to the height of the car they were in. The first offender was a little taller than the Forte, while the second was about the same height as the car.

¶ 9 Gogada testified that when he spoke to detectives the day after the shooting, he described the shooter as having "braids," but he also stated he told detectives he was not sure. On cross-examination, Gogada testified that he guessed when he told police the shooter had braids because he did not know what to call the shooter's hairstyle. He denied telling the police that the shooter had shoulder length hair, and he also said the shooter was wearing a hood.

¶ 10 He further testified that he did not know if he told defense counsel's investigator that the shooter had braids. However, Gogada later admitted that when he met with defense counsel's investigator and defense counsel, defense counsel had hair that was "twisted and down to her shoulders" and that he said during the interview that the shooter had similar hair. He also added that he told the investigator and defense counsel that he was not sure about the shooter's hair.

¶ 11 T.B.,[3] who was 14 at the time of the shooting, identified respondent as the person she knew as May-May, although she said, "I think that's him. He look [*sic*] a little different if that is him." On January 22, 2023, T.B. spent the day with her friend, A.C. T.B. had a curfew of 6:30 p.m. Around 5 p.m., T.B. and A.C. were picked up by respondent driving a stolen Forte. A male teenager, Jamari, was in the front passenger seat. Two other male teenagers, Maurice and Donmarvon, were in the back seat. T.B. did not know any of their real names. She knew Jamari as "Fazo," Maurice as "Lil Bloody," and Donmarvon as "V-dot." T.B. said she was 5'2" tall at the time of the shooting, and that respondent was a little shorter than her and that Maurice was 6'1" or 6'2".

¶ 12 Before leaving, T.B. chose to leave her phone behind so that her mother could not track her location. The group first went to a gas station so T.B. could get something to drink. When the group left the gas station, respondent, who was 14 at the time, was still driving. The group drove around listening to music before stopping at a Home Depot so the boys could buy a screwdriver to use to steal a car. The group left Home Depot, with respondent still driving, and went to Chatham Cinema where Maurice tried to steal another car before reentering the Forte. They then drove to the rear of the Lowe's where they saw three men walking in the same direction they were driving. Respondent told Maurice, "I bet you won't poke them," and T.B. testified that the phrase was slang for, "I bet you won't rob them." Respondent passed a handgun to Maurice, who was seated behind respondent, and Maurice exited the car.

¶ 13 T.B. testified that Maurice had a "little fro" at the time of the shooting, but she could not remember what kind of hairstyle respondent had. Maurice got out of the car at first, followed by respondent who was holding a long, black gun two and a half feet in length. T.B. claimed that

[3]Where possible, minors involved have been referred to by their initials. The record does not reflect the last names of the other 3 teenage boys involved to allow us to refer to them by their initials. Thus, they are referred to by first name only.

Jamari removed the gun from his pants and handed it to respondent. Maurice ordered the three men to give him their money while pointing his gun at them. Respondent was aiming the rifle at the three men during the robbery. Maurice and respondent were about to get back in the car when T.B. heard two gunshots. Both were fired by respondent.

¶ 14 The group of teenagers drove away and later located a Hyundai Sonata which Maurice stole while respondent acted as a lookout. The group transferred from the Forte to the Sonata and drove to the parking lot of a Captain Hook's restaurant. Maurice exited the car and walked off on his own to steal a Hyundai Elantra parked nearby while everyone else waited in the car. Maurice returned with the car, respondent got into the driver's seat, and the group transferred into the Elantra. Respondent drove to his home where he and Jamari got out of the car to record a video of themselves with the guns.

¶ 15 The next day, T.B. spent time with respondent, Maurice, Donmarvon, and A.C. But she denied that they discussed the shooting. On February 23, 2023, officers came to T.B.'s home and took her to Area 2. She identified photos of the four boys who were with her in the car on the night of the shooting, and she identified respondent as the shooter. T.B. learned from an article the day after the shooting that someone had been injured. T.B. sent the article to respondent because she wanted him to know what happened.

¶ 16 Surveillance camera footage of the shooting shows the Forte stop just in front of Nandepu, Koppala, and Gogada. One of the offenders exits the rear driver side passenger seat and approaches the three men. Several seconds later, the driver exits the car holding a rifle and approaches the three men before walking back to the car. As the first offender begins to walk back to the car, the driver opens fire. Two of the men fall down and the other crouches down. Both offenders re-enter

the car in their original seats and the car speeds off. Both offenders appear to be wearing hooded clothing.

¶ 17 Additional surveillance camera footage shows the subsequent transfers of the teenagers from the Forte to the Sonata and from the Sonata to the Elantra. However, while the footage is of poor quality, it is clear that the driver of the Sonata transfers to the Elantra's front passenger seat.

¶ 18 Defense counsel's investigator Terrence Cook testified that he interviewed Gogada on January 23, 2024, and that Gogada said one of the offenders had dreadlocks or braids, but he did not specify which offender had that hairstyle. When defense counsel asked Gogada during the interview whether the hair was like hers, shoulder length and braided, Gogada said, "Yes, kind of like yours." Cook later contacted Gogada over Zoom and Gogada clarified that his statement regarding hairstyle pertained to the shooter.

¶ 19 Two days after the shooting, Stephanie Primer, respondent's mother, went to a police station looking for help with respondent. She was concerned he was driving cars despite not having a driver's license. She returned to the police station on January 26, 2023, but in her testimony she initially denied that she told anyone that respondent fired a gun in the house or that she saw a video of respondent holding a gun. However, she acknowledged that when detectives later came to her home, she told them that she heard gunshots coming from respondent's bedroom. Several weeks prior to the shooting, Primer found a spent rifle cartridge in her living room, which she saved in a box and gave to police. She denied having found the cartridge in respondent's bedroom, but admitted that she showed the detectives a bullet hole in respondent's bedroom ceiling, and that the day she heard a gunshot she went to respondent's bedroom and smelled smoke. She testified that respondent told her the gunshot came from outside. She admitted telling police that she wanted respondent off the streets before he hurt someone or someone hurt him because she did not "have

time to bury a 14-year-old." Primer examined a photograph taken around Christmas in 2022 and identified respondent. Respondent had short hair in the photograph.

¶ 20 Detective Andrew Kemps testified that he and his partner, Detective James Smith, interviewed Gogada on January 23, 2023. Gogada told them the driver of the Forte had shoulder-length braids and he never expressed any uncertainty about the driver's hairstyle. On January 24, 2023, Kemps overheard Primer asking for help with her son at the front desk of the Area 2 station. Primer told Kemps that her son was driving stolen cars and she showed Kemps a video of her son holding a gun. He spoke with Primer again on January 26, 2023, at the Area 2 station where she stated she had seen respondent with a rifle. He also testified that Primer told him respondent shot a gun in his bedroom, that she smelled gunpowder in his bedroom, and that she found a spent cartridge case in respondent's bedroom.

¶ 21 The same day, Kemps, Smith and other officers, traveled to Primer's home where they performed a search. Primer turned over the expended .223 cartridge case she had found, and showed the officers the bullet hole in the ceiling of respondent's bedroom. The officers then went upstairs and asked the tenant of the unit above Primer's if they could search the premises. After being allowed inside, Kemps discovered a hole in the floor directly above where respondent's room was located. Kemp also noticed three small holes in the ceiling, but he could not determine if the damage was caused by the bullet.

¶ 22 On January 26, 2023 around 6 p.m., officers located respondent and Maurice based on information given to them by Primer. Officers performed patdowns of Maurice and respondent and recovered a semi-automatic firearm from Maurice. During the patdown of respondent, which yielded no weapons, respondent stated, "They mad they can't catch us." Maurice was placed under arrest, and the officers transported respondent to Hartgrove Hospital at Primer's request.

¶ 23 Respondent was arrested on March 13, 2023, during a traffic stop. Respondent was in the front passenger seat and his mother was driving. The arresting officers recovered a white cell phone from respondent which was associated with an Instagram account named "9blockamaine." That account included a photograph of respondent holding a black rifle.

¶ 24 An evidence technician swabbed the interior of the Forte, taking samples from the driver compartment including the interior door handle, interior door pull, steering wheel, gearshift, and seat belt press. The driver compartment of the Sonata was likewise swabbed, with samples taken from the steering wheel, gearshift, door handle, seat belt, turn signal lever, the armrest on the driver's door, and the armrest on the center console. Two swabs in total were used to collect all the DNA samples—evidence technicians procured all the samples from each car using a single swab.

¶ 25 Brian Schoon, a forensic scientist with the Illinois State Police, analyzed a buccal swab taken from respondent and compared it against swabs taken from the Forte and Sonata. He determined that the swabs from each vehicle had a mixture of four profiles. Of those four profiles found in the Forte, one contributed 59% of the mixture and another contributed 35%. The remaining two profiles contributed 3% and 2%, respectively. The analysis demonstrated that it was "190 septillion times more likely" that the mixture of the four profiles originated from the DNA of respondent plus three other unknown contributors rather than four unknown contributors. According to Schoon, respondent's DNA profile "aligned" with the profile that contributed 59% of the mixture and considered the results "very strong support" for the conclusion that respondent contributed to the mixture.

¶ 26 Analysis of the samples taken from the Sonata revealed a separate mixture of four profiles. Of those four profiles, one contributed 45% of the mixture and another contributed 27%. The remaining two contributed 16% and 12%. Schoon testified that it was "76 trillion times more

likely" that the mixture originated from respondent and three unknown individuals rather than four unknown individuals. He stated that respondent's DNA profile "aligned best" with the profile that contributed 45% of the mixture. Schoon admitted that he could not tell from DNA analysis who was driving the cars, how the DNA got there, or how long it had been there.

¶ 27 Mark Pomerance, a forensic scientist employed by the Illinois State Police specializing in the analysis of physical evidence related to firearms, testified that he analyzed three fired .223 rifle cartridges recovered from the scene of the shooting and compared it to the fired .223 cartridge recovered from respondent's home. Pomerance did not know what firearm fired the cartridges, but he concluded they were all fired from the same firearm.

¶ 28 Nandepu died as the result of a gunshot wound that entered through his back, striking both lungs and his spinal column. Koppala required emergency surgery on his left lung and was discharged on February 4, 2023.

¶ 29 The jury returned verdicts of guilty for first degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm, and armed robbery. On December 3, 2025, the trial court ordered that respondent be committed to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice until the age of 21. The trial court also sentenced respondent to an adult sentence of 45 years for first degree murder, 10 years for aggravated battery with a firearm, and 6 years for armed robbery. The adult sentence was stayed, and the order stated that the adult sentence would be vacated upon respondent's successful completion of his juvenile sentence. Respondent filed a notice of appeal on December 15, 2025.

¶ 30 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 31 On appeal, respondent argues that the State failed to prove him guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Specifically, he argues that this was a case of identity and that the State failed to prove that respondent was the perpetrator. He does not challenge any other aspect of the State's case and

acknowledges that the offenses of first degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm, and armed robbery took place. Nor does he dispute that he was among the six teenagers in the Forte at the time of the offense. Thus, our analysis is confined to whether the State presented sufficient evidence to establish beyond a reasonable doubt that respondent was the individual who shot and killed Nandepu and shot Koppola. Before reaching the merits of this appeal, we must also briefly address the timeframe for our disposition.

¶ 32 As an appeal from a final judgment in a delinquent minor proceeding, absent good cause, our disposition must be filed within 150 days from the date respondent's notice of appeal was filed. Ill. S. Ct. R. 660A(f) (eff. July 1, 2018). Respondent's notice of appeal was filed on December 15, 2025. The record was filed on January 20, 2026, and supplements to record were filed on January 29, 2026, March 17, 2026, March 31, 2026, April 14, 2026, and June 8, 2026. Respondent's brief was filed on July 16, 2026, after requesting and receiving four extensions of time. The State's brief was filed on September 11, 2026, after requesting and receiving one extension of time. Respondent's reply brief was filed on September 18, 2026. Given that briefing was not complete until well after the 150-day deadline, good cause exists for filing our disposition outside of the deadline.

¶ 33 Due process protects an accused against conviction except upon proof beyond a reasonable doubt of every fact necessary to constitute the crime with which he is charged. U.S. Const. amend. XIV; *In re Winship*, 397 U.S. 358, 364 (1970). This standard applies equally to juvenile delinquency proceedings. *In re O.S.*, 2018 IL App (1st) 171765, ¶ 34. It is fundamental to our system of criminal justice that the accused is presumed innocent and the State bears the burden of proving every element of the charged offense beyond a reasonable doubt. *People v. Weinstein*, 35 Ill. 2d 467, 469-70 (1966). To obtain a conviction for a criminal offense, the State must prove

beyond a reasonable doubt that a criminal offense was committed and the identity of the person who committed the offense. *People v. Lara*, 2012 IL 112370, ¶ 17.

¶ 34 When determining whether the evidence at trial was sufficient, the question is whether, viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, any rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime proven beyond a reasonable doubt. *People v. Cunningham*, 212 Ill. 2d 274, 278 (2004). "The standard gives full play to the responsibility of the trier of fact fairly to resolve conflicts in the testimony, to weigh the evidence, and to draw reasonable inferences from basic facts to ultimate facts." *People v. Campbell*, 146 Ill. 2d 363, 375 (1992). Therefore, we may not substitute our judgment for that of the fact finder on questions involving the weight of the evidence or the credibility of the witnesses, and we will not reverse a criminal conviction unless the evidence is so unreasonable, improbable, or so unsatisfactory as to justify a reasonable doubt of respondent's guilt. *Id*. Identification of the accused by a single eyewitness is sufficient to sustain a conviction, provided that the witness viewed the accused under circumstances permitting a positive identification. *People v. Johnson*, 114 Ill. 2d 170, 189 (1986).

¶ 35 An identification will not be deemed sufficient to support a conviction if it is vague or doubtful. *People v. Slim*, 127 Ill. 2d 302, 307 (1989). However, the persuasiveness of identification testimony is strengthened by the witness's prior acquaintance with the accused. *People v. Barnes*, 364 Ill. App. 3d 888, 895 (2006).

¶ 36 Neither Gogada nor Koppala were able to identify the shooter. Gogada's description of the shooter was uncertain and varied, at times describing the shooter as having shoulder-length braided hair. However, the shooting happened at night, the shooter was wearing a hood, and he admitted that he only looked at the shooter for a couple seconds. Koppala likewise stated that he was primarily focused on the first individual that was robbing them. The only person who positively

identified respondent as the shooter was T.B., who was acquainted with respondent and was in the car with him. Thus, it is fair to say that this case turned primarily on T.B.'s testimony.

¶ 37 Respondent argues that T.B. was not credible, and that without her testimony, the remainder of the evidence established only that respondent was present at the scene of the crime. We agree that T.B.'s testimony was not without some inconsistencies. T.B. testified that respondent was the only person who drove a car that night. However, this is refuted by the video evidence. While none of the videos introduced are clear enough to definitively determine who was driving without T.B.'s testimony, the video of the group's transfer from the Sonata to the Elantra shows the driver of the Sonata getting into the front passenger seat of the Elantra. Thus, it is impossible that only one person drove all three cars.

¶ 38 Respondent argues that T.B.'s testimony was also unreliable because she was self-interested and that she "intentionally involved herself in illegal activity and hoped to avoid getting into trouble." The point of respondent's argument is clear—that T.B. had a motivation to lie when she identified respondent as the shooter, and therefore no rational trier of fact could believe her testimony. However, respondent's argument is that T.B. feared getting in trouble with her mother and that she only spoke with police when officers came to her home and confronted her with the evidence that she was in the stolen Forte used in the shooting. We do not see the logic of this argument, nor how T.B.'s desire to avoid discipline would cause her to falsely identify respondent as the shooter rather than the actual shooter. We see no evidence in the record to support, nor does respondent suggest, that T.B. falsely accused respondent because she was, in fact, the perpetrator.

¶ 39 Evaluating the credibility of the witnesses and resolving inconsistencies or potential biases is the province of the jury. Minor inconsistencies in the testimony between witnesses or within one witness's testimony may affect the weight of the evidence but does not automatically create a

reasonable doubt of guilt. *People v. Joiner*, 2018 IL App (1st) 150343, ¶ 62. The trier of fact must judge how flaws in parts of a witness's testimony, including inconsistencies with prior statements, affect the credibility of the whole. *Id*. The trier of fact may accept or reject all or part of a witness's testimony. *Id*. While we owe the jury's verdict deference, we do not owe it unwavering fealty. *People v. Powell*, 2021 IL App (1st) 181745, ¶ 48. In this case, whether T.B. incorrectly believed that respondent was driving the entire night is ultimately of little consequence. She was seated in the car with respondent, an individual she was acquainted with, and the testimony revealed nothing that would have prevented her from accurately observing respondent exit the car and fire at the victims. Determining whether her testimony was credible was the purview of the jury, and the inconsistencies identified by respondent do not make T.B.'s testimony so unreasonable, improbable, or unsatisfactory as to justify supplanting the jury's determination with our own. *Campbell*, 146 Ill. 2d at 375.

¶ 40 Moreover, there are additional pieces of circumstantial evidence that, while not conclusive, support T.B.'s testimony that respondent was the shooter. The mixture of DNA recovered from the driver's compartment of the Forte supported the conclusion that respondent was in the driver's seat at some point that night. The spent .223 cartridge casing recovered from respondent's home was fired from the same weapon that fired the rounds that killed Nandepu and injured Koppala, and respondent's own mother made statements about him firing a gun in the house. Respondent's Instagram account also had a photo of him holding a rifle, which demonstrated that he had access to a rifle.

¶ 41 T.B. spent a significant portion of the night with respondent and was acquainted with him. She observed respondent pointing the rifle at the victims before she witnessed him fire, and did so from a position where she was not the person being robbed or otherwise threatened such that it

would have diverted her focus from the identity of the shooter. Viewing her testimony, buttressed by the circumstantial evidence, in the light most favorable to the State, we find that a rational trier of fact could conclude that respondent was guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. We thus have no basis to disturb the trial court's judgment.

¶ 42 III. CONCLUSION

¶ 43 For the reasons stated, we affirm the judgment of the circuit court of Cook County.

¶ 44 Affirmed.