ELECTRONICALLY FILED DEC 22, 2025 CLERK OF SUPREME COURT

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF IOWA
Supreme Court No. 25-1225
Buchanan County No. SRCR086704

STATE OF IOWA,
Plaintiff–Appellee,

vs.

CLARENCE JAAY JACKSON,
Defendant–Appellant.

APPEAL FROM THE IOWA DISTRICT COURT
FOR BUCHANAN COUNTY
THE HONORABLE JOHN J. SULLIVAN, JUDGE

BRIEF FOR APPELLEE

BRENNA BIRD
Attorney General of Iowa

JOSEPH D. FERRENTINO
Assistant Attorney General
Hoover State Office Building, 2nd Floor
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
(515) 281-5976
Joseph.Ferrentino@ag.iowa.gov

SHAWN M. HARDEN
Buchanan County Attorney

JENALEE ZAPUTIL
Assistant County Attorney

ATTORNEYS FOR PLAINTIFF–APPELLEE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES 3

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW 4

ROUTING STATEMENT 5

NATURE OF THE CASE 5

STATEMENT OF THE FACTS 5

ARGUMENT 7

I. Sufficient evidence supports the conviction for assault causing bodily injury. 7

II. The sentencing court did not abuse its discretion. 11

CONCLUSION 13

REQUEST FOR NONORAL SUBMISSION 14

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE 15

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

State Cases

Anderson v. Iowa Dist. Ct., 989 N.W.2d 179 (Iowa 2023) 11

In re Marriage of Benhart, No. 11-0017, 2012 WL 170610 9

State v. Arnold, 543 N.W.2d 600 (Iowa 1996) 8, 9

State v. Benson, 919 N.W.2d 237 (Iowa 2018) 8

State v. Collins, No. 22-1832, 2024 WL 2045329 (Iowa Ct. App. May 8, 2024) 8

State v. Crawford, 972 N.W.2d 189 (Iowa 2022) 7, 8

State v. Damme, 944 N.W.2d 98 (Iowa 2020) 11, 13

State v. Evans, 672 N.W.2d 328 (Iowa 2003) 11, 12

State v. Formaro, 638 N.W.2d 720 (Iowa 2002) 12

State v. Johnson, 513 N.W.2d 717 (Iowa 1994) 11, 12

State v. Loyd, 530 N.W.2d 708 (Iowa 1995) 11

State v. Thomas, 547 N.W.2d 223 (Iowa 1996) 12

State v. Wright, 340 N.W.2d 590 (Iowa 1983) 12

State Statutes

Iowa Code § 907.3 12

Iowa Code § 708.2(2) 5

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

I. **Whether sufficient evidence supports the conviction.**

II. **Whether the sentencing court abused its discretion.**

ROUTING STATEMENT

The Court should transfer this matter to the Court of Appeals for application of existing legal principles. Iowa R. App. P. 6.1101(3).

NATURE OF THE CASE

Following a bench trial before the Honorable John J. Sullivan of the Iowa District Court for Buchanan County, Clarence Jaay Jackson was convicted of assault causing bodily injury, a serious misdemeanor, in violation of Iowa Code section 708.2(2). D0064, Order of Disposition at 1 (6/20/2025). The court sentenced Jackson to 60 days in jail and a fine of $430 with a 15% surcharge. *Id.* at 1–2. Jackson appeals his conviction and sentence.

STATEMENT OF THE FACTS

In June 2023, Ashley Walker lived in Independence with her six children. D0086, Trial Tr. (4/23/2025, 4/24/2025) at 106:13–107:17. The appellant, Clarence Jackson, is the father of three of those children. *Id.* at 109:18–24. Walker and Jackson have never been married. *Id.* at 110:24–25.

Jackson occasionally visited Walker and his children at her residence to play video games. *Id.* at 111:22–113:22. On June 17, 2023, he showed up after Walker had gone to sleep for the night. *Id.* at 116:1–19. Upon arriving, he told W.W., who is not his child, to clean the living room and his room. *Id.* at 13:10–12, 16:5–6. W.W. cleaned the living room, but he told Jackson

his bedroom was already clean. *Id.* at 17:3–18:3. W.W. could tell Jackson was getting angry, and Jackson was threatening to beat W.W. with a belt, so he told Jackson he would call his dad if Jackson "whoop[ed]" him. *Id.* at 18:4–22.

Jackson went to his car and retrieved a leather belt. *Id.* at 19:2–9, 20:22–21:1, 211:13–19. Jackson then returned inside and met W.W. in his bedroom. *Id.* at 20:2–11. Jackson told W.W. to pull down his pants, and when W.W. refused, Jackson pulled them down himself. *Id.* at 20:15–21, 21:20–24. Jackson hit W.W. with the belt "five or six" times. *Id.* at 23:9–12, 233:8–11; *see* D0063, Exh. 1, Video at 0:00–0:08 (6/18/2025). Jackson told W.W., "You better not talk to me like that again." D0086 at 24:16–19. Jackson told W.W., "So the next time you talk to me like that, I'm gonna make it worse." D0063, Exh. 2, Video at 0:07–0:11 (6/18/2025). Jackson left the room and W.W. went to sleep. D0086 at 28:1–21.

W.W.'s sister, L.W., recorded the encounter. *See generally* D0063. She sent her recordings to W.W.'s father, Christian Perry, via text message. D0086 at 147:12–148:19. Hearing his son wailing on those recordings made him "very angry"—even at trial, it still "[made him] tremble." *Id.* at 149:2–7; *see* D0063, Exh. 1 at 0:00–0:08.

The next day was Father's Day, and Perry picked W.W. up for a visit. D0086 at 143:21–144:1, 147:1–9. Perry drove W.W. to a nearby Burger King—the first place he could find with a private bathroom—and had W.W. remove his pants so Perry could examine W.W.'s injuries. *Id.* at 151:2–25. Perry saw bruising, which he described as "vibrant and welted," on W.W.'s buttocks. *Id.* at 151:25, 155:5. Perry then took W.W. to a police station, which led to this case. *Id.* at 152:14–19. Over the next few days, W.W.'s bruising intensified. *Id.* at 158:7–13.

ARGUMENT

I. Sufficient evidence supports the conviction for assault causing bodily injury.

Preservation of Error

When a defendant proceeds to trial and is convicted of a crime, "[t]he trial itself raises the issue of the sufficiency of the evidence, and the verdict is the decision on the issue." *State v. Crawford*, 972 N.W.2d 189, 198 (Iowa 2022). The State does not contest error preservation.

Standard of Review

> [This Court] review[s] the sufficiency of the evidence for correction of errors at law. In conducting that review, [it is] highly deferential to the jury's verdict. The jury's verdict binds this court if the verdict is supported by substantial evidence. Substantial evidence is evidence sufficient to convince a rational trier of fact the defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. In determining whether the jury's

> verdict is supported by substantial evidence, [this Court] view[s] the evidence in the light most favorable to the State, including all legitimate inferences and presumptions that may fairly and reasonably be deduced from the record evidence.

Id. at 202 (marks and citations omitted).

Merits

Below, Jackson claimed his actions constituted reasonable corporal punishment. *See* D0034, Notice of Defense – Justification at 1 (4/22/2025). The district court rejected that defense. D0058, Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Ruling at 4 (5/22/2025). On appeal, Jackson argues (1) the court erred in concluding such a defense is available only to parents, (2) Jackson stood in the shoes of a parent for purposes of corporal punishment, and (3) the corporal punishment was reasonable. Appellant's Br. at 18–24. These claims fail.

The district court did not err in concluding this defense is available only to parents. *See State v. Arnold*, 543 N.W.2d 600, 602–03 (Iowa 1996) (discussing the rights of a "parent" to discipline their child). The cases Jackson cites for the contrary position are inapposite. *See State v. Benson*, 919 N.W.2d 237, 242–43 (Iowa 2018) (assuming without deciding that fiancée could assert defense and finding substantial evidence that defendant's conduct was "abusive rather than corrective in character"); *State v. Collins*, No. 22-1832, 2024 WL 2045329, at *3 (Iowa Ct. App. May

8, 2024) (assuming without deciding defense was available and finding jury "could rationally conclude [conduct] went beyond reasonable corporal punishment," when viewed in light most favorable to the State); *In re Marriage of Benhart*, No. 11-0017, 2012 WL 170610, at *2 (considering whether stepmother's discipline warranted modification of custody arrangement). They do not establish the defense is available to non-parents. *Arnold*, however, is binding precedent that suggests the opposite. *See* 543 N.W.2d at 602–03. The court did not err in sticking to that case's holding.

Even if this Court disagrees, though, Jackson was in no position, factually, to claim the status of a parent. Jackson came around Walker's home only sporadically. D0086 at 112:15–113:1 (Walker testifying Jackson came to her place once or twice a month, unannounced, for a couple hours at a time). While the parties disagreed on exactly how often that was, the district court was free to find Jackson was not credible on this point and accept other testimony that had him in the house maybe once or twice a month for a couple hours at a time. While he was there, he played video games and did hair for his daughters. *Id.* at 113:20–23. He was not W.W.'s biological father, stepfather, or legal guardian. The district court had sufficient evidence to reject this contention as a factual matter, even if it

were to accept, as a legal proposition, the theoretical possibility of someone in Jackson's position being a "parent."

Finally, even if this Court disagrees with both of those contentions, this still was not appropriate discipline, as the district court found.[1] *See* D0058 at 4 ("Even if [Jackson] had such a right, his infliction of corporal punishment was not reasonable considering the circumstances."). Jackson hit W.W. with a belt repeatedly, leaving visible bruises. *See* D0086 at 151:24–25. He left welts on W.W.'s buttocks from his "discipline," and reduced W.W. to tears, while angrily yelling at him. *See* D0063, Exh. 1 at 0:00–0:08. Jackson testified he saw no difference between using a belt and a hand for discipline. D0086 at 229:4–7. He testified using a belt was appropriate discipline for a child. *Id.* at 238:1–11. The district court did not err in finding this was inappropriate discipline not subject to the protections our law affords parents acting in good faith.

[1] Because the district court ruled that "[e]ven if [Jackson] had" the right to administer physical discipline, "his infliction of corporal punishment was not reasonable," any error in the court's ruling that he was not entitled to the corporal-punishment defense is harmless. D0058 at 4.

II. The sentencing court did not abuse its discretion.

Preservation of Error

Illegal sentences may be corrected at any time. *Anderson v. Iowa Dist. Ct.*, 989 N.W.2d 179, 181 (Iowa 2023). The State does not contest error preservation.

Standard of Review

"A sentencing court's decision to impose a specific sentence that falls within the statutory limits is cloaked with a strong presumption in its favor, and will only be overturned for an abuse of discretion or the consideration of inappropriate matters." *State v. Damme*, 944 N.W.2d 98, 105–06 (Iowa 2020). "An abuse of discretion is found when the court exercises its discretion on grounds clearly untenable or to an extent clearly unreasonable." *State v. Evans*, 672 N.W.2d 328, 331 (Iowa 2003).

Merits

Sentencing courts weigh multiple factors. *State v. Johnson*, 513 N.W.2d 717, 719 (Iowa 1994). The district court "is to weigh all pertinent matters in determining a proper sentence including the nature of the offense, the attending circumstances, the defendant's age, character, and propensities or chances for reform." *State v. Loyd*, 530 N.W.2d 708, 713 (Iowa 1995). Courts must also consider "the defendant's prior record of convictions or deferred judgments, employment status, family

circumstances, and any other relevant factors, as well as which of the sentencing options would satisfy the societal goals of sentencing." *State v. Formaro*, 638 N.W.2d 720, 725 (Iowa 2002).

A sentencing court has the discretion to weigh all the relevant factors. *State v. Wright*, 340 N.W.2d 590, 593 (Iowa 1983). "[N]o single factor alone is determinative." *Johnson*, 513 N.W.2d at 719 (citation omitted). A sentencing court need not explain its reasoning for rejecting particular sentencing options. *State v. Thomas*, 547 N.W.2d 223, 225 (Iowa 1996).

Here, the sentencing court could have chosen to impose probation instead of a jail sentence, but it did not. *See* Iowa Code § 907.3 (permitting probation); D0064 at 1 (imposing jail sentence). Jackson argues that was a "clearly untenable" abuse of discretion. *See Evans*, 672 N.W.2d at 331. The State disagrees.

As it was imposing sentence, the court discussed that Jackson had no right to impose this discipline. D0087, Sent. Tr. (6/20/2025) at 13:19–14:5. The court said this assault "crossed the line" and was "unnecessary." *Id.* at 14:11–12. The court noted this happened because Jackson felt "disrespected" by W.W., and the court further noted Jackson wasn't "very honest" when he reported what had happened to Walker. *Id.* at 14:13–22. The court said it watched the video supplied by L.W., "and there is no

reason for this to have happened," *id.* at 14:23–25, which the State interprets as a comment on the egregious nature of the offense that is evident from the video. The court also noted its concern that Jackson had reported homicidal ideation—specifically, he "mentioned that doesn't everybody have homicidal ideation at times." *Id.* at 15:11–16. Based on all these factors, the court believed "probation is not going to do anything because . . . your attitude is not going to change towards at least with your own children." *Id.* at 15:5–8.

The court explained its reasons thoroughly. The sentence the court imposed was within statutory limits and enjoys a strong presumption in its favor. *Damme*, 944 N.W.2d at 105–06. The court did not abuse its discretion in imposing this sentence. Jackson's sentencing challenge fails.

CONCLUSION

This Court should affirm.

REQUEST FOR NONORAL SUBMISSION

The State requests nonoral submission.

Respectfully submitted,

BRENNA BIRD
Attorney General of Iowa



JOSEPH D. FERRENTINO
Assistant Attorney General
Hoover State Office Bldg., 2nd Fl.
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
(515) 281-5976
Joseph.Ferrentino@ag.iowa.gov

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

This brief complies with the typeface requirements and type-volume limitation of Iowa Rs. App. P. 6.903(1)(g) and 6.903(1)(i)(1) or (2) because:

- This brief has been prepared in a proportionally spaced typeface using Georgia in size 14 and contains **1,911** words, excluding the parts of the brief exempted by Iowa R. App. P. 6.903(1)(i)(1).

Dated: December 22, 2025

JOSEPH FERRENTINO
Assistant Attorney General
Hoover State Office Bldg., 2nd Fl.
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
(515) 281-5976
Joseph.Ferrentino@ag.iowa.gov