



Supreme Court of New Zealand | Te Kōti Mana Nui o Aotearoa

2 July 2026

MEDIA RELEASE

ETHAN WEBSTER v R

(SC 3/2026)

Hearing in the Supreme Court Thursday 16 July 2026

CASE HISTORY SYNOPSIS

This synopsis is provided to assist in understanding the history of the case and the issues to be heard by the Court. It does not represent the views of the panel that will hear the appeal in the Supreme Court.

Background

In December 2022, Mr Webster pleaded guilty in the High Court to the murder of Jacob Ramsay. Mr Webster, who was 18 years old at the time of the offending, participated in the killing of Mr Ramsay alongside a co-offender, William Candy (then 39).

An expert assessment from a clinical psychologist was obtained before Mr Webster entered a plea. It concluded that there were no issues that might significantly interfere with Mr Webster's ability to meaningfully participate in court proceedings and to adequately communicate with counsel. The psychologist had not been asked to address Mr Webster's fitness to stand trial specifically.

The High Court sentenced Mr Webster to life imprisonment in March 2023 with a minimum period of imprisonment of 12 years.

Following sentencing, further reports were obtained to support Mr Webster's sentence appeal to the Court of Appeal that a life sentence was manifestly unjust. The reports suggested that Mr Webster might be intellectually disabled and affected by foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

The issues raised by those reports led Mr Webster to pursue an appeal against conviction, in addition to his appeal against sentence.

Court of Appeal decision

On 18 December 2025, the Court of Appeal allowed Mr Webster's appeal against sentence, but dismissed his appeal against conviction. The Court accepted that, if Mr Webster had been unfit when he pleaded guilty, that would have given rise to a miscarriage of justice because his trial (when entering a plea) was unfair.

However, upon reviewing the various assessments provided — including two health assessor reports the Court itself had commissioned — the Court was not satisfied that Mr Webster was unfit at the time he entered his plea. The Court considered that while Mr Webster may have benefited from a communication assistant, he entered his plea understanding the important matters relevant to his decision to enter a guilty plea. The Court concluded the trial was not unfair on this basis.

The Court also rejected an argument that there had been a miscarriage of justice. Mr Webster's counsel argued that the absence of information about Mr Webster's undiagnosed mental impairment meant he could not evaluate a defence structured around a lack of murderous intent. The Court considered that there was no real risk that the information about Mr Webster's impairment would have affected the decision to enter the guilty plea.

In terms of Mr Webster's sentence, the Court considered that the new information was materially relevant to his culpability. It concluded that life imprisonment was manifestly unjust. After receiving further sentencing submissions, the Court of Appeal on 9 March 2026 substituted a finite sentence of 14 years' imprisonment with a period of imprisonment of seven years.

This appeal

On 16 April 2026, the Supreme Court granted Mr Webster leave to appeal. The approved question is whether the Court of Appeal was correct to dismiss the appeal.

Viewing of hearing

This courtroom is open to the public.

This hearing of the appeal will also be live-streamed. Details about access to the live-stream and the conditions of access will be posted on the [Courts of New Zealand website](#) shortly before the hearing. No recording is permitted.

The panel

The Hon Justice Kós	The Hon Justice Ellen France	The Rt Hon Chief Justice Winkelmann	The Hon Justice Williams	The Hon Justice Cooke
---------------------	------------------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------

Judges as seen from the public gallery

Counsel

- Ethan Webster (Appellant): *M J Dyhrberg KC, H G de Groot and T J Conder*
- The King (Respondent): *A J Ewing and E P C Duckett*

Sitting hours

Court will begin at 10:00am and conclude at 4:00pm with adjournments taken from 11:30am to 11:45am and from 1:00pm to 2:15pm. There is no afternoon adjournment.

Enquiries

Any enquiries about the hearing should be directed via email to supremecourt@justice.govt.nz. While attending the hearing, enquiries can also be directed to the Court Registry, which is located outside the main courtroom in the Supreme Court foyer.

Contact person:

Sue Leaupepe, Supreme Court Registrar (04) 914 3613

Court of Appeal decision: [\[2025\] NZCA 679](#) (18 December 2025)

Supreme Court leave decision: [\[2026\] NZSC 32](#) (16 April 2026)

