

SUPREME COURT COPY

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No. S051968

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA,)
))
Plaintiff and Respondent,)
))
v.) (Santa Clara County
) Sup. Ct No. SC169362)
VALDAMIR FRED MORELOS,)
))
Defendant and Appellant.)
_____)

SUPREME COURT
FILED

SEP 14 2015

~~APPELLANT'S REPLY BRIEF
MAY NOT BE EXAMINED WITHOUT COURT ORDER
CONTAINS MATERIAL FROM SEALED RECORD~~

Frank A. McGuire Clerk

Appeal from the Judgment of the Superior Court of
the State of California for the County of Santa Clara

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DEATH PENALTY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
APPELLANT’S REPLY BRIEF	1
INTRODUCTION	1
ARGUMENT	3
I. REVERSAL IS REQUIRED BECAUSE THE TRIAL COURT ERRED IN DENYING APPELLANT’S REQUEST FOR ADVISORY COUNSEL	3
G. Reversal Is Required Under Any Standard of Prejudice	8
1. The Per Se Reversal Standard	8
2. The <i>Watson</i> Standard	10
II. ALLOWING APPELLANT TO REPRESENT HIMSELF, WAIVE A JURY TRIAL AND JOIN THE PROSECUTION TEAM TO ACHIEVE A DEATH SENTENCE WAS TANTAMOUNT TO ACCEPTING A GUILTY PLEA, IN VIOLATION OF PENAL CODE SECTION 1018 AND STATE AND FEDERAL CONSTITUTIONAL LAW	15
III. THE COMPLETE BREAKDOWN IN THE ADVERSARY PROCESS AT APPELLANT’S TRIAL VIOLATED DUE PROCESS AND REQUIRES REVERSAL	21
C. The Adversary System Broke Down When the Prosecutor Improperly Gave Appellant a Road Map for His Guilt Phase Testimony That Led Appellant to Change His Earlier Statements and Testify to Fill in Evidentiary Gaps in the Prosecution’s Favor	24

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
D. The Breakdown in the Adversary System Meant the Evidence Was Not Tested	27
1. The Prosecutor Presented Misleading Evidence	27
2. The Court Failed to Impose Statutory Controls During the Prosecutor’s Questioning of Appellant	28
J. The Breakdown in the Adversary Process Constituted Structural Error	33
2. Under Any Standard, Appellant’s Conviction and Death Sentence Must Be Reversed	34
 IV. BECAUSE APPELLANT’S TRIAL WAS FUNDAMENTALLY UNFAIR, THE PROSECUTION DID NOT PROPERLY DISCHARGE ITS BURDEN OF PROOF, AND STATUTORY AND CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES WERE NOT FOLLOWED, THE RESULT WAS SO UNRELIABLE THAT APPELLANT’S CONVICTION AND SENTENCE MUST BE OVERTURNED UNDER <i>PEOPLE v. BLOOM</i>	 39
C. Because the Requirements of <i>Bloom</i> Were Not Met at Appellant’s Trial, the Reliability Demanded by the Eighth Amendment Was Never Satisfied	40
1. Contrary to Respondent’s Argument, Significant Factual Differences in <i>Bloom</i> Distinguish Appellant’s Case	40
2. The Proceeding Below Did Not Satisfy the “Vigorous Standards” of <i>Bloom</i>	42

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
a. The prosecution did not discharge its burden of proof at appellant’s trial pursuant to the rules of evidence.	43
b. The death verdict was not returned under proper procedures and instructions.	48
c. The trier of fact has duly considered the relevant mitigating evidence, if any, which the defendant has chosen to present.	58
3. The Court’s Post <i>Bloom</i> Cases Are Distinguishable	60
a. Failure to present mitigation during contested proceedings.	60
b. Testifying or arguing for a death verdict.	64
c. The out-of-state cases cited in <i>Bloom</i> are distinguishable.	65
V. THE TRIAL COURT ERRED WHEN IT PERMITTED APPELLANT TO REPRESENT HIMSELF AT HIS CAPITAL TRIAL	68
VII. APPELLANT WAS DENIED AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF HIS AUTOMATIC MOTION FOR MODIFICATION OF THE DEATH VERDICT, IN VIOLATION OF STATE LAW AND THE EIGHTH AND FOURTEENTH AMENDMENTS	70
A. Introduction	70

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
C. <i>People v. Weaver</i> Does Not Foreclose Appellant's Argument	70
D. All Defendants Sentenced to Death in California, Whether by Judge or by Jury, Are Entitled to a Trial-Level, Independent Review of the Death Verdict	72
1. Independent Review of the Sentencing Verdict at the Trial Court Level Provides a Critical Safety Valve Necessary to Ensure the Reliability and Fairness Required by the United States and California Constitutions in Death Penalty Cases	72
2. The Legislature Intended to Provide Independent Review at the Trial Level for Judge-Sentenced Defendants	77
E. The Denial of an Independent, Trial Level Review of Appellant's Death Verdict Deprived Him of His Rights Under the United States and California Constitutions	78
G. The Denial of Independent Review in this Case Requires Remand for a Hearing Conducted by a Different Judge	79
IX. THE CONVICTION, DEATH ELIGIBILITY FINDINGS AND DEATH VERDICT IN THIS CASE ARE UNRELIABLE IN VIOLATION OF THE FIFTH, SIXTH, EIGHTH AND FOURTEENTH AMENDMENTS TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION AND SECTIONS 1, 7, 15, 16 AND 17 OF ARTICLE I OF THE CALIFORNIA CONSTITUTION AND MUST BE SET ASIDE	81

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
CONCLUSION	90
CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL	91

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Page(s)

FEDERAL CASES

<i>Almendarez-Torres v. United States</i> (1998) 523 U.S. 224	78
<i>Atkins v. Virginia</i> (2002) 536 U.S. 304	57
<i>Beck v. Alabama</i> (1980) 447 U.S. 625	19
<i>Bonin v. Vasquez</i> (C.D. Cal. 1992) 807 F.Supp. 589	73
<i>Bradshaw v. Stumpf</i> (2005) 545 U.S. 175	59
<i>Burt v. Titlow</i> (2013) __ U.S. __, 134 S.Ct. 10	76
<i>Caldwell v. Mississippi</i> (1985) 472 U.S. 320	19, 84
<i>California v. Brown</i> (1987) 479 U.S. 538	13
<i>Chambers v. Mississippi</i> (1973) 410 U.S. 295.	23
<i>Chapman v. California</i> (1967) 386 U.S. 18.	37
<i>Eddings v. Oklahoma</i> (1982) 455 U.S. 104	13, 59
<i>Estelle v. Smith</i> (1981) 451 U.S. 454	55

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>Faretta v. California</i> (1975) 422 U.S. 806	18, 68, 69
<i>Ford v. Wainwright</i> (1986) 477 U.S. 399	40, 82
<i>Hendricks v. Calderon</i> (9th Cir. 1995) 70 F.3d 1032	55
<i>Johnson v. Zerbst</i> (1938) 304 U.S. 458	36
<i>Kyles v. Whitley</i> (1995) 514 U.S. 419	42
<i>Never v. United States</i> (1999) 527 U.S. 1	34
<i>Oregon v. Guzek</i> (2006) 546 U.S. 517	40
<i>Parker v. Dugger</i> (1991) 498 U.S. 308	42
<i>Powell v. Alabama</i> (1932) 287 U.S. 45	33
<i>Pulley v. Harris</i> (1984) 465 U.S. 37	passim
<i>Robb v. Connolly</i> (1884) 111 U.S. 624	75-76
<i>Rock v. Arkansas</i> (1987) 483 U.S. 44	22, 23

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>Sawyer v. Smith</i> (1990) 497 U.S. 227	82
<i>Stansbury v. California</i> (1994) 511 U.S. 318	16
<i>Sullivan v. Louisiana</i> (1993) 508 U.S. 275	37
<i>Tennard v. Dretke</i> (2004) 542 U.S. 274	13
<i>Trainor v. Hernandez</i> (1977) 431 U.S. 434	76
<i>United States v. Agurs</i> (1976) 427 U.S. 97	32
<i>United States v. Cronin</i> (1984) 466 U.S. 648	19, 20
<i>United States v. Gonzalez- Lopez</i> (2006) 548 U.S. 140	34, 35
<i>United States v. Jin Fuey Moy</i> (1916) 241 U.S. 394	78
<i>United States v. Pablo Varela-Rivera</i> (9th Cir. 2002) 279 F.3d 1174	33
<i>Von Moltke v. Gillies</i> (1948) 332 U.S. 708	36
<i>Williams v. Taylor</i> (2000) 529 U.S. 362	59

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Page(s)

Woodson v. North Carolina
(1976) 428 U.S. 280 13

STATE CASES

Bishop v. State
(1979) 95 Nev. 511 [597 P.2d 273, 276] 66

Bunnell v. Superior Court
(1975) 13 Cal.3d 592 18

Grunwald-Marx, Incorporated v. Los Angeles Joint Board
(1959) 52 Cal.2d 568 40

Hamblen v. State
(1988) 527 So.2d 800 66

In re Gay
(1998) 19 Cal.4th 771 55

In re Sakarias
(2005) 35 Cal.4th 140 35

In re William F.
(1974) 11 Cal.3d 249 9

*Lombardi v. Citizens National Trust and Savings
Bank of Los Angeles*
(1951) 137 Cal.App.2d 206 54

Oppenheimer v. Ashburn
(1959) 173 Cal.App.2d 624 72

People v. Alfaro
(2007) 41 Cal.4th 1277 passim

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Anderson</i> (1972) 6 Cal.3d 628	75
<i>People v. Anzalone</i> (2013) 56 Cal.4th 545	34, 35, 37
<i>People v. Arias</i> (1996) 13 Cal.4th 92	73
<i>People v. Bell</i> (2007) 40 Cal.4th 582	45
<i>People v. Bigelow</i> (1984) 37 Cal.3d 731	passim
<i>People v. Birks</i> (1998) 19 Cal.4th 108	82
<i>People v. Blackburn</i> (2015) 61Cal.4th 1113, [2015 D.A.R 9457]	9, 33, 84, 85
<i>People v. Blair</i> (2005) 36 Cal.4th 686	62
<i>People v. Bloom</i> (1989) 48 Cal.3d 1194	passim
<i>People v. Boyce</i> (2014) 59 Cal. 4th 672	17
<i>People v. Boyd</i> (1985) 38 Cal.3d 762	58
<i>People v. Bradford</i> (1997) 15 Cal.4th 1229	16, 64, 65

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Brown</i> (1988) 46 Cal.3d 432	38, 83, 84
<i>People v. Brown</i> (2014) 59 Cal.4th 86	64
<i>People v. Burgener</i> (1986) 41 Cal.3d 505	87
<i>People v. Cahill</i> (1993) 5 Cal.4th 478	10, 36
<i>People v. Carson</i> (2005) 35 Cal.4th 1	68
<i>People v. Centeno</i> (2014) 60 Cal.4th 659	26-27
<i>People v. Chadd</i> (1981) 28 Cal.3d 739	passim
<i>People v. Chatman</i> (2006) 38 Cal.4th 344	31
<i>People v. Chism</i> (2014) 58 Cal.4th 1266	3, 49
<i>People v. Clark</i> (1990) 50 Cal.3d 583	18
<i>People v. Clark</i> (1992) 3 Cal.4th 41	7, 60, 61
<i>People v. Clayton</i> (2002) 28 Cal.4th 346	7, 24

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Coffman</i> (2004) 34 Cal.4th 1	58
<i>People v. Crandall</i> (1988) 46 Cal.3d 833	7, 8, 9
<i>People v. Cunningham</i> (2015) 61 Cal.4th 609	17, 18
<i>People v. Daggett</i> (1990) 225 Cal.App.3d 751	46
<i>People v. Davenport</i> (1995) 11 Cal.4th 1171	73
<i>People v. Diaz</i> (1992) 3 Cal.4th 495	passim
<i>People v. Diaz</i> (2015) 60 Cal.4th 1176	61
<i>People v. Elmore</i> (2014) 59 Cal.4th 121	57
<i>People v. Ervine</i> (2009) 47 Cal.4th 745	81
<i>People v. Espinoza</i> (1992) 3 Cal.4th 806	80
<i>People v. Foster</i> (2010) 50 Cal.4th 1301	76
<i>People v. Franklin</i> (1961) 194 Cal.App.2d 23	46

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Frierson</i> (1979) 25 Cal.3d 142	73, 78
<i>People v. Fuiava</i> (2012) 53 Cal.4th 622	passim
<i>People v. Geiger</i> (1984) 35 Cal.3d 510	82
<i>People v. Gonzales</i> (2012) 54 Cal.4th 1234	31
<i>People v. Good Willie</i> (2007) 147 Cal.App.4th 695	8-9
<i>People v. Guerra</i> (2006) 37 Cal.4th 1067	71
<i>People v. Guzman</i> (1988) 45 Cal.3d 915	62
<i>People v. Hajek and Vo</i> (2014) 58 Cal.4th 1144	76
<i>People v. Hill</i> (1992) 3 Cal.4th 959	1
<i>People v. Hill</i> (1998) 17 Cal.4th 800	3
<i>People v. Holt</i> (1997) 15 Cal.4th 619	57
<i>People v. Horner</i> (1975) 15 Cal.3d 60	9

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Horning</i> (2004) 34 Cal.4th 871	73, 74, 75, 78
<i>People v. Howard</i> (1992) 1 Cal.4th 1132	61
<i>People v. Jackson</i> (2014) 58 Cal.4th 724	37
<i>People v. Johnson</i> (1980) 26 Cal.3d 557	33
<i>People v. Jones</i> (1998) 17 Cal.4th 279	22
<i>People v. Lancaster</i> (2007) 41 Cal.4th 50	22
<i>People v. Lang</i> (1989) 49 Cal.3d 991	61
<i>People v. Loker</i> (2008) 44 Cal.4th 691	31
<i>People v. Lynch</i> (2010) 50 Cal.4th 693,721-722	68
<i>People v. Mai</i> (2013) 57 Cal.4th 986,1055	17, 18, 65
<i>People v. Massie</i> (1985) 40 Cal.3d 620	16, 19
<i>People v. Massie</i> (1998) 19 Cal.4th 550	77

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. McKenzie</i> (1983) 34 Cal.3d 616	24, 29, 35, 49
<i>People v. McKinnon</i> (2011) 52 Cal.4th 610	69
<i>People v. McWhorter</i> (2009) 47 Cal.4th 318	33
<i>People v. Memro</i> (1995) 11 Cal.4th 786	73
<i>People v. Mincey</i> (1992) 2 Cal.4th 408	82
<i>People v. Morrison</i> (2004) 34 Cal.4th 698	58
<i>People v. Mosby</i> (2004) 33 Cal.4th 353.	15, 16
<i>People v. O'Bryan</i> (1913) 165 Cal. 55	85
<i>People v. Pearson</i> (2013) 56 Cal.4th 393	7
<i>People v. Phillips</i> (1985) 41 Cal.3d 29	23
<i>People v. Preciado</i> (1978) 78 Cal.App.3d 144	52
<i>People v. Proctor</i> (1992) 4 Cal.4th 499	58

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Reyes</i> (1998) 19 Cal.4th 743	87
<i>People v. Robertson</i> (1989) 48 Cal.3d 18	77
<i>People v. Robinson</i> (1964) 61 Cal.2d 373	29
<i>People v. Robles</i> (1970) 2 Cal.3d 205	22
<i>People v. Rundle</i> (2008) 43 Cal.4th 76	71
<i>People v. Sanders</i> (1990) 51 Cal.3d 471	62, 63, 87
<i>People v. Sherrick</i> (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 657	46
<i>People v. Silagy</i> (1984) 101 Ill.2d. 147 [461 N.E.2d 415]	65, 66
<i>People v. Snow</i> (2003) 30 Cal.4th 43	63, 87-88
<i>People v. Stansbury</i> (1993) 4 Cal.4th 1017	16
<i>People v. Stanworth</i> (1969) 71 Cal.2d 820	56, 77, 86
<i>People v. Stitely</i> (2005) 35 Cal.4th 514	31

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Stowell</i> (2003) 31 Cal.4th 1107	71
<i>People v. Sturm</i> (2006) 37 Cal.4th 1218	29
<i>People v. Suff</i> (2014) 58 Cal.4th 1013	76
<i>People v. Sullivan</i> (2007) 151 Cal.App.4th 524	7, 8
<i>People v. Taylor</i> (2009) 47 Cal.4th 850	68
<i>People v. Teron</i> (1979) 23 Cal.3d 103	77
<i>People v. Watson</i> (1956) 46 Cal.2d 818	passim
<i>People v. Weaver</i> (2012) 53 Cal.4th 1056	passim
<i>People v. Wharton</i> (1991) 53 Cal.3d 522	59
<i>People v. Whisenhunt</i> (2008) 44 Cal.4th 174	23
<i>People v. Wilkins</i> (2013) 56 Cal.4th 333	38
<i>People v. Wright</i> (1987) 43 Cal.3d 487	15

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
<i>People v. Young</i> (2005) 34 Cal.4th 1149	58
<i>People v. Zambrano</i> (2004) 124 Cal.App.4th 228	3
<i>Price v. Superior Court</i> (2001) 25 Cal.4th 1046	1-2, 62
<i>Rosato v. Superior Court</i> (1975) 51 Cal.App.3d 190	32
<i>State v. Earp</i> (Md. 1990) 571 A.2d 1227	50
<i>State v. Harding</i> (1983) 137 Ariz. 278 [670 P.2d 383, 400]	66
<i>State v. McCormick</i> (N.C. 1979) 259 S.E.2d 880	49
<i>State v. Squire</i> (N.C. 1988) 364 S.E.2d 354	49
<i>Taylor v. Bell</i> (1971) 21 Cal.App.3d 1002	54

CONSTITUTIONS

U.S.Const., Amends. 5	70, 79, 80
6	passim
8	passim
14	passim
Cal. Const., art. I, §§ 7	passim
15	passim
16	82, 89

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
17	passim
art. VI, § 13	9, 33, 84

STATE STATUTES

Cal. Evid. Code, §§	352.	29, 45, 76
	422	23
	520	46
	761	23, 29, 43
	765	48
	773 subd. (b)	29
	1101	23, 76
	1101 subd. (a)	23
	1101 subs. (a) & (b)	45
Cal. Penal Code, §§	190.3, factor (a)	23
	190.3, factor (b)	23
	190.3, factor (d)	57
	190.3, factor (j)	57, 58
	190.3, factor (k)	58
	190.4, subd. (e)	passim
	667, subd. (a)	48
	686.1	86, 88
	1018	15, 16, 18, 19
	1192.7	48
	1368	11

COURT RULES

Cal. Rules of Court,	8.204 subd. (a)(1)(B)	75
	8.360 (c)(5)(B)	34

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Page(s)

TEXT AND OTHER AUTHORITIES

American Bar Association’s Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance of Defense Counsel in Death Penalty Cases (Feb. 2003 rev.), guidelines 5.1., Qualifications of Defense Counsel, § B.2.e.; 10.11, The Defense Case Concerning Penalty, § F.2	6
Chortek, <i>The Psychology of Unknowing: Inadmissible Evidence in Juries and Bench Trials</i> (2013) 32 Rev. Lit. 117	7
Commission on Judicial Performance (2003) <i>Inquiry Concerning Judge D. Ronald Hyde, No. 166</i> , 48 Cal.4th CJP Supp. 329	54-55
Gershmann, <i>Witness Coaching by Prosecutors</i> (2002) 23 Cardozo L. Rev. 829	42
National Conference of State Trial Judges et al., Capital Cases Bench Book (1994) National Criminal Justice Service Reference Service 148216, 1-6 & 7; 6-72 < https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/148216NCJRS.pdf > [as of Sept. 9, 2015]	55
Oxford Dictionaries < http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/co-opt?q=coopt > [as of Sept. 9, 2015]	50
Tanford, <i>The Ethics of Evidence</i> (2002) 25 Am. J. Trial Advoc. 487	44, 45, 50
Wistrich, <i>Can Judges Ignore Inadmissible Information? The Difficulty of Deliberately Disregarding</i> (2005) 153 U. Pa. L.Rev. 1251	36

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<u>Page(s)</u>
Wydick, <i>The Ethics of Witness Coaching</i> (1995) 17 Cardozo L.Rev 1	50

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA,)
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 Plaintiff and Respondent,) No. S051968.
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 v.) (Santa Clara County,
) Sup. Ct. No. SC169362)
 VALDAMIR FRED MORELOS,)
)
)
 Defendant and Appellant.)
)

APPELLANT'S REPLY BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

Appellant replies to contentions by the State that require an answer in order to present the issues fully to this Court. However, he does not reply to arguments that are adequately addressed in the opening brief. In particular, appellant does not present a reply on Arguments VI and XIII.

The failure to address any particular argument, sub-argument or allegation made by the state, or to reassert any particular point made in the opening brief, does not constitute a concession, abandonment or waiver of the point by appellant (see *People v. Hill* (1992) 3 Cal.4th 959, 995, fn. 3, overruled on another ground in *Price v. Superior Court* (2001) 25 Cal.4th

1046, 1071, 1075), but reflects appellant's view that the issue has been adequately presented and the positions of the parties fully joined. The arguments in this reply are numbered to correspond to the argument numbers in Appellant's Opening Brief.¹

///

///

¹ All statutory references are to the Penal Code unless stated otherwise. As in the opening brief, the clerk's transcript is cited as "CT," the Supplemental Clerk's Transcript as "SCT" and the reporter's transcript as "RT." For each citation, the volume number precedes, and the page number follows, the transcript designation. Other shorter transcripts that are not part of a Reporter's Transcript volume are referred to by the date of the proceeding, followed by the page number.

ARGUMENT

I.

REVERSAL IS REQUIRED BECAUSE THE TRIAL COURT ERRED IN DENYING APPELLANT'S REQUEST FOR ADVISORY COUNSEL

Appellant argued, and the record establishes, that had the court recognized it had discretion to grant appellant's request for advisory counsel, it would have done so. (AOB 34-46.) Respondent acknowledges this Court's holding that a court's failure to recognize that California law permits it to appoint advisory counsel is error (RB 58, citing *People v. Bigelow* (1984) 37 Cal.3d 731, 743), but answers that (1) appellant only requested help with expert witnesses, and then withdrew his request, and (2) the court's denial of the request would not have been an abuse of discretion. (RB 58-62.) For the reasons set forth below and in the opening brief, this Court should reject respondent's arguments. Under the circumstances, the court's failure to appoint advisory counsel constitutes reversible error.

Appellant's withdrawal of his request for assisting counsel would have been futile as he did so only after the court repeatedly told him it did not have the authority to grant it, and instead urged appellant to give up self-representation. (12/20/95 RT 1-6, 8; AOB 40-41; see *People v. Chism* (2014) 58 Cal.4th 1266, 1291 [on appeal, defendant may raise claim his codefendant made at trial even though defendant did not join in the objection, where defendant reasonably believed doing so would be futile]; *People v. Hill* (1998) 17 Cal.4th 800, 820 [defendant will be excused from making timely objection and/or request for admonition to prosecutorial misconduct if either would be futile]; *People v. Zambrano* (2004) 124 Cal.App.4th 228, 237 [futility may arise when the trial judge errs by

overruling proper objections].) Respondent's argument that the court never precluded further consideration of appellant's request (RB 62), fails, as additional requests by appellant would have been in vain.

Respondent argues without a citation to the record that appellant withdrew his request when he found out that his application for an attorney in a support role would involve delay and threaten his complete control in the courtroom. (RB 60, 61.) No record support for this assertion exists. (See 12/20/95 RT 1-8.) Although at other times appellant expressed a wish for a speedy trial, that consideration played no role here.

Respondent also argues that appellant withdrew his motion once the court helped appellant realize that what he was really asking for was investigative assistance to help track down mental health experts. (RB 60-62.) Again, the record does not support this contention. The court did not tell appellant he needed investigative help; rather, it distinguished between appellant's requests for experts, which were properly before Judge Hastings, and his application for attorney assistance, which Judge Hastings had sent to the court. (12/20/95 RT 4.)

The topic of expert witnesses came up twice during the hearing on appellant's request for advisory counsel. After the court told appellant that he "need[ed] a lawyer to tell [him] what to do," but that it lacked the "legal ability" to appoint one, the following exchange took place:

DEFENDANT: Really I would like to have someone in the capacity of an advisor in --

COURT: That's -- you used exactly the right word.

DEFENDANT: Not really with the court though. I'm asking Judge Hastings for expert witnesses and psychologists and psychiatrists and --

COURT: Well, you see, those applications are properly before Judge Hastings,² and this, of course, came to Judge Hastings and he sent it back to me because I granted your *Faretta* motion, and he thought it was appropriate – and I agreed with him – that I would hear this application and try to explain to you what’s involved.

Because *Keenan* counsel is not a synonym for expert witnesses or investigation or anything of that nature. It is solely limited – none of these are involved in your case. This is our next case, Mr. Morelos – so I’m in a spot, and I don’t want to put you in a spot.

(12/20/95 RT 3-4.) The court continued to urge appellant to abandon self-representation, and indicated it might continue the matter to bring in the public defender, appellant’s former counsel. (12/20/95 RT 3-5.) It was then that appellant stated, “I would like to have it withdrawn, then, withdraw the motion, if it’s –.” (12/20/95 RT 5.) The court responded that it was “trying to plead” with him to accept counsel. (*Ibid.*) The colloquy continued:

DEFENDANT: Well, everything’s going fine in my preparations, except this (sic) new expert witnesses. I’m not really – I could kind of, you know, work it around, you know but --

COURT: Well, I – again I just hope it’s going fine for you, because I just think it’s so important that you have representation, and I – I’m so hesitant to have granted your motion, which you have the absolute right to bring, but – I’ve discussed this matter with you on the record before, and I

² Judge Hastings was assigned to handle the section 987.9 motions. (11/17/95 RT 1-3.)

don't want to plough any ground we've already ploughed, but I – You don't want me to call Mr. Cavagnaro [appellant's former counsel] for you.

DEFENDANT: No. No. No, thank you.

(12/20/95 RT 6.) These are appellant's only statements about expert witnesses during the hearing.

Thus, appellant never stated that he needed help with tracking down expert witnesses and the record does not suggest appellant had a problem doing so. (See, e.g., 1 RT 128 [appellant has new psychiatrist]; 2 RT 388-389 [appellant describes using superior court list to obtain a mental health expert].) Later, when appellant planned to have the competency examiners testify at the penalty phase, there was a discussion about whether the district attorney, defense investigator or court should contact them (2 RT 390-391, 450), but nothing in the record suggests that appellant's problem was tracking down experts.

Rather, as discussed *post*, in section G.2. of this argument, the record indicates that appellant's problem was that he did not understand the appropriate expert or experts for purposes of a penalty phase mitigation case. Determining the appropriate mental health expert or experts for a capital trial is the responsibility of the attorney, not an investigator. (See, e.g., American Bar Association's Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance of Defense Counsel in Death Penalty Cases (Feb. 2003 rev.), guidelines 5.1., Qualifications of Defense Counsel, § B.2.e.; 10.11, The Defense Case Concerning Penalty, § F.2 and commentary thereto at p. 1061 ["Counsel should choose experts who are tailored specifically to the needs of the case. . . ."].)

In summary, the court erroneously believed it lacked authority to appoint advisory counsel for appellant, whether it was to help appellant in general, or for the specific purpose of working with mental health experts.

Respondent argues that in any case, it would not have been an abuse of discretion to deny the application for advisory counsel. (RB 61-62.) Respondent claims that “appellant managed his trial preparations actively and effectively,” citing to appellant’s requests for supplies, a legal runner, an opportunity to contact witnesses, and asking the court for help when he had trouble getting these things. (RB 59.) Respondent does not address appellant’s specific argument and record citations showing that while appellant was able to discuss concrete matters such as supplies and phone privileges, appellant’s participation in legal discussions during hearings on pretrial matters was minimal. (AOB 43-44.) Thus, for example, unlike the defendants in *People v. Clark* (1992) 3 Cal.4th 41, 111-112, abrogation on another ground recognized by *People v. Pearson* (2013) 56 Cal.4th 393, 462, and *People v. Crandall* (1988) 46 Cal.3d 833, 864-866 (*Crandall*), abrogated on other grounds in *People v. Clayton* (2002) 28 Cal.4th 346, 364-365, appellant never demonstrated any abilities regarding arguing motions or examining witnesses. (AOB 42-45.)

People v. Sullivan (2007) 151 Cal.App.4th 524, 554-555 (*Sullivan*), cited by respondent (RB 61), supports appellant’s position. There, the trial court’s refusal to appoint advisory counsel for the trial was not an abuse of discretion, because unlike appellant, the defendant had acted as his own attorney many times in the past and had demonstrated his legal abilities pre-trial when he brought “a plethora of motions that related to admission of evidence, presentation of defenses, [and] discovery.” (*Ibid.*) In addition, the *Sullivan* court pointed out that the court had exercised its discretion by

appointing advisory counsel for the limited purpose of investigating and presenting mental defenses. (*Sullivan, supra*, 151 Cal.App.4th at p. 554.) This demonstrated that the trial court understood how to exercise discretion. (*Ibid.*) Following *Sullivan*, the court minimally should have appointed advisory counsel to assist appellant in working with a mental health expert or experts for purposes of presenting mitigating evidence at the penalty phase.

G. Reversal Is Required Under Any Standard of Prejudice

1. The Per Se Reversal Standard

Respondent has not addressed appellant's argument that under the per se reversal standard of *People v. Bigelow, supra*, 37 Cal.3d at p. 744 (*Bigelow*), appellant's conviction and death sentence must be vacated. (AOB 46.) Respondent suggests in a footnote without development that this per se reversal standard may have been impliedly overruled by *Crandall, supra*, 46 Cal.3d at p. 863, which found no error in failing to appoint advisory counsel and then applied the test of *People v. Watson* (1956) 46 Cal.2d 818, 836 (*Watson*). (RB 58-59, fn. 3.) Respondent seems to suggest that because there is no federal constitutional right to advisory counsel, only the *Watson* test is applicable. (*Ibid.*)

However, while this Court in *Bigelow* recognized that there was no federal constitutional right to advisory counsel, it nevertheless applied a per se standard of reversal where a court's failure to appoint advisory counsel (because it failed to recognize its authority to do so), would have been error. (*Bigelow, supra*, 37 Cal.3d at p. 744.) The Court chose this standard because of "the impossibility of assessing the effect of the absence of counsel upon the presentation of the case." (*People v. Good Willie* (2007)

147 Cal.App.4th 695, 715, quoting *Bigelow, supra*, 37 Cal.3d at pp. 744-745.)

In *Crandall*, where, had the court understood it had the authority to appoint counsel and its refusal to do so would not have been an abuse of discretion, this Court held that “a rule of per se reversal is unnecessary and unwarranted.” (*Crandall, supra*, 46 Cal.3d at p. 864.) In that circumstance, the *Watson* standard for state law error applied. (*Ibid.*) This was not an implied overruling of *Bigelow*; rather, the Court there applied different prejudice tests to different factual and legal scenarios.

Bigelow is also consistent with California’s “miscarriage of justice” standard under Article VI, section 13 of the state Constitution as applied to procedural errors under state law that may or may not have affected the outcome. (See *People v. Blackburn* (2015) 61Cal.4th 1113 [2015 DAR 9457, 9465].) In this regard, “it may be impossible, or beside the point, to evaluate the resulting harm by resort to the trial record,” (*Id.* at p. 9466.) *Bigelow* discussed analogous case scenarios on the impossibility of assessing prejudice. (*Bigelow, supra*, 37 Cal.3d at p. 745, citing *In re William F.* (1974) 11 Cal.3d 249, 256 [no realistic measure of prejudice from counsel’s nonparticipation in argument is possible where record does not reflect different directions proceedings might have taken and what different results might have obtained] and *People v. Horner* (1975) 15 Cal.3d 60, 70 [denial of free transcript of prior trial does not just taint one piece of evidence but infects all evidence offered at later trial; no way of knowing how transcript could have assisted defense].)

In determining that the per se reversal standard applied in *Bigelow*, the Court found that while the trial judge occasionally offered advice and assistance to the defendant, and his prior counsel helped with getting family members in to testify, no one explained to the defendant how to select a