

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF TENNESSEE
AT KNOXVILLE
July 14, 2026 Session

FILED

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Clerk of the
Appellate Courts

MARIE VERNON WOLFE v. DERREK PUGH

Appeal from the Circuit Court for Washington County
No. 36796 Suzanne Cook, Judge

No. E2026-00043-COA-R3-CV

A judgment creditor domesticated a South Carolina judgment in Tennessee under the Uniform Enforcement of Foreign Judgments Act. When the creditor moved to extend the unsatisfied, domesticated judgment pursuant to Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 69.04, the judgment debtor objected on the basis that the foreign judgment had since expired and was unenforceable under South Carolina law. The trial court granted the judgment creditor's motion and extended the domesticated judgment for an additional ten years. The judgment debtor appealed. We affirm.

Tenn. R. App. P. 3 Appeal as of Right; Judgment of the Circuit Court
Affirmed; Case Remanded

JOHN W. MCCLARTY, P.J., E.S., delivered the opinion of the court, in which THOMAS R. FRIERSON, II and WILLIAM E. PHILLIPS II, JJ., joined.

Will A. Ellis, Kingsport, Tennessee, for the appellant, Derrek Pugh.

Edward Thurston Brading, Johnson City, Tennessee for the appellee, Marie Vernon Wolfe.

OPINION

I. BACKGROUND

The facts are undisputed. Plaintiff-Appellee Marie Vernon Wolfe ("judgment creditor") received a default judgment for \$700,000 against Defendant-Appellant Derek Pugh ("judgment debtor"). The \$700,000 judgment was entered on October 8, 2015, by the Court of Common Pleas for the Ninth Judicial District in Charleston County, South Carolina ("foreign judgment").

On May 24, 2017, the judgment creditor filed an authenticated copy of the foreign judgment and an affidavit with the Clerk of the Washington County, Tennessee, Circuit Court (“trial court”), pursuant to the provisions of the Uniform Enforcement of Foreign Judgments Act, Tennessee Code Annotated section 26-6-101 *et seq.* (“Uniform Act”). A summons issued on May 24, 2017, and was served on the judgment debtor on June 12, 2017. The judgment debtor made no response.

On August 14, 2017, the trial court entered an order confirming the foreign judgment in Tennessee under the Uniform Act. The trial court’s order confirmed the foreign judgment and decreed it as

entitled to full faith and credit, as of the same effect as, to be treated in the same manner as, and capable of being enforced in the same manner as a judgment of a court of record of Tennessee, and that any stay of execution or of enforcement is vacated and expired. The court’s confirmation is not in derogation of any rights and remedies already afforded to the [judgment creditor] under the Uniform Enforcement of Foreign Judgments Act, Tenn. Code Ann. § 26-6-101 *et seq.* in the absence of an order of the court.

On September 22, 2025, the judgment creditor moved the trial court to “extend for an additional ten years the [domesticated] judgment that was entered in this matter on August 14, 2017,” pursuant to Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 69.04. In its motion, the judgment creditor explained, “[w]ith the single exception of a payment in the amount of \$320.10 obtained in June 2025 through the garnishment of Express Title & Closing, LLC, the judgment remains unsatisfied.”

On October 15, 2025, the judgment debtor responded in opposition to the motion to extend the judgment. He acknowledged that the South Carolina foreign judgment was properly domesticated in Tennessee in 2017. Citing a South Carolina statute,¹ he argued, “the Foreign Judgment has expired and become unenforceable under South Carolina law” because “South Carolina law limits enforcement of [a] judgment rendered in that state to just ten years.” According to the judgment debtor, the limitations period began to run when the South Carolina trial court entered the judgment on October 8, 2015, meaning it was “unenforceable as of October 9, 2025.” The judgment debtor pressed that “Tennessee merely recognizes foreign judgments. Enrollment does not create a new judgment.”

Following a hearing, the trial court granted the judgment creditor’s motion and

¹ “Executions may issue upon final judgments or decrees at any time within ten years from the date of the original entry thereof and shall have active energy during such period, without any renewal or renewals thereof, and this whether any return may or may not have been made during such period on such executions.” S.C. Code Ann. § 15-39-30.

entered its Order Extending Judgment on December 19, 2025. Based on the Uniform Act's statutory language in sections 26-6-104(b) and (c), the trial court found:

That the foreign judgment enrolled in this court on August 14, 2017, has the same effect as and is to be treated in the same manner as a judgment in Tennessee. Because judgments are subject to renewal under Tenn. R. Civ. P. 69.04, [the judgment creditor's] motion to extend is GRANTED. Accordingly, the *Order Confirming Foreign Judgment* that was entered in this case on August 14, 2017, is hereby extended for an additional ten years through August 14, 2037.

On January 9, 2026, the judgment debtor appealed. On the same day the judgment debtor filed his appellate brief, this Court issued its opinion in *Poser Investments, Inc. v. Old National Hospitality Company*, No. M2024-00855-COA-R3-CV, 2026 WL 880504 (Tenn. Ct. App. Mar. 31, 2026) (designated for publication). In her appellate brief, the judgment creditor cited *Poser Investments* as persuasive authority, to which the judgment debtor filed a reply brief. At oral argument, the parties agreed that *Poser Investments* would be considered controlling authority in this appeal because it was designated for publication in the official reporter. Tenn. R. S. Ct. 4(G)(2) ("Opinions reported in the official reporter . . . shall be considered controlling authority for all purposes unless and until such opinion is reversed or modified by a court of competent jurisdiction.").

II. ISSUE

The parties agree the sole issue on appeal is:

Whether the trial court erred in granting the judgment creditor's motion to extend the domesticated judgment pursuant to Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 69.04 even though the original foreign judgment had expired under South Carolina law.

III. STANDARD OF REVIEW

Statutory interpretation is a question of law, which we review de novo, affording no presumption of correctness to the conclusions of the trial court. *State v. Crank*, 468 S.W.3d 15, 21 (Tenn. 2015); *In re Baby*, 447 S.W.3d 807, 817 (Tenn. 2014); *Mansell v. Bridgestone Firestone N. Am. Tire, LLC*, 417 S.W.3d 393, 399 (Tenn. 2013) (citing *Waters v. Farr*, 291 S.W.3d 873, 882 (Tenn. 2009)). The principles of statutory interpretation are well established. When reading "statutory language that is clear and unambiguous, we must apply its plain meaning in its normal and accepted use, without a forced interpretation that would limit or expand the statute's application." *Eastman Chem. Co. v. Johnson*, 151

S.W.3d 503, 507 (Tenn. 2004). “The text of the statute is of primary importance, and the words must be given their natural and ordinary meaning in the context in which they appear and in light of the statute’s general purpose.” *Mills v. Fulmarque, Inc.*, 360 S.W.3d 362, 368 (Tenn. 2012). The court’s “duty in construing statutes is to ascertain and give effect to the intention and purpose of the legislature.” *Eastman Chem. Co.*, 151 S.W.3d at 507. “When a statute is clear, we apply the plain meaning without complicating the task.” *In re Baby*, 447 S.W.3d at 817.

IV. DISCUSSION

Our Tennessee Supreme Court recognizes that “[t]he United States Constitution requires that each state give full faith and credit to the public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of every other state.” *New v. Dumitrache*, 604 S.W.3d 1, 18 (Tenn. 2020) (citing U.S. CONST. art. IV, § 1). “A valid final judgment rendered by a court with jurisdiction over the parties and the subject matter ‘qualifies for recognition throughout the land.’” *Poser Invs., Inc. v. Old Nat’l Hosp. Co.*, No. M2024-00855-COA-R3-CV, 2026 WL 880504, at *1 (Tenn. Ct. App. Mar. 31, 2026) (designated for publication) (quoting *Baker ex rel. Thomas v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 522 U.S. 222, 233 (1998)). This “does not mean that States must adopt the practices of other States regarding the time, manner, and mechanisms for enforcing judgments.” *Baker*, 522 U.S. 222 at 235. A judgment from another state must be domesticated before it can be enforced in Tennessee. *Poser Invs.*, 2026 WL 880504, at *2 (citing *Frazier v. Frazier*, 72 S.W.3d 333, 335 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2001)).

“Tennessee courts have repeatedly held that a judgment creditor has ten years from the time a foreign judgment is rendered to seek domestication in Tennessee.” *Poser Invs.*, 2026 WL 880504, at *2 (citations omitted). Here, the parties agree that the South Carolina foreign judgment was timely and properly domesticated in Tennessee by order entered August 14, 2017, and that this was done under the “streamlined process” of the Uniform Act, Tennessee Code Annotated section 26-6-101 *et seq.* *See id.* (detailing the “faster and less expensive way to domesticate and enforce a foreign judgment” in Tennessee under the Uniform Act); *New*, 604 S.W.3d at 18. The parties disagree whether the domesticated judgment is still enforceable in Tennessee given that South Carolina law limits enforcement of judgments in that state to ten years and no more:

Executions may issue upon final judgments or decrees at any time within ten years from the date of the original entry thereof and shall have active energy during such period, without any renewal or renewals thereof, and this whether any return may or may not have been made during such period on such executions.

S.C. Code Ann. § 15-39-30. By contrast, in Tennessee, a judgment creditor generally has

ten years from the entry of a domestic judgment to seek to enforce it, Tenn. Code Ann. § 28-3-110(a)(2); *Poser Invs.*, 2026 WL 880504, at *2, but an unsatisfied judgment may be extended under Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 69.04.² Rule 69.04 provides:

Within ten years from the entry of a judgment, the creditor whose judgment remains unsatisfied may file a motion to extend the judgment for another ten years. A copy of the motion shall be mailed by the judgment creditor to the last known address of the judgment debtor. If no response is filed by the judgment debtor within thirty days of the date the motion is filed with the clerk of court, the motion shall be granted without further notice or hearing, and an order extending the judgment shall be entered by the court. If a response is filed within thirty days of the filing date of the motion, the burden is on the judgment debtor to show why the judgment should not be extended for an additional ten years. The same procedure can be repeated within any additional ten-year period.

Tenn. R. Civ. P. 69.04.

Here, because the South Carolina trial court entered the original judgment on October 8, 2015, it expired under South Carolina law on October 8, 2025. The judgment debtor contends that allowing the domesticated Tennessee judgment to outlive the original South Carolina foreign judgment would afford it “more than full faith and credit.” The judgment debtor argues that this Court should treat the domesticated judgment as “derivative of the original foreign judgment and therefore subject to any limitations imposed thereon by the rendering state.” Citing *Poser Investments*, the judgment creditor counters that domestication of a foreign judgment results in a new Tennessee judgment for purposes of the ten-year expiration period and that “nothing prevents” the new Tennessee judgment from being extended under Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 69.04.

In *Poser Investments*, a judgment creditor timely domesticated a Georgia judgment in Tennessee under the Uniform Act. *Poser Invs.*, 2026 WL 880504, at *1. The foreign judgment was rendered by a Georgia trial court in 2012 and was domesticated in Tennessee in 2018. *Id.* When the judgment creditor sought to execute on the domesticated judgment in 2024, one of the judgment debtors argued that “Tennessee’s ten-year statute of limitations for actions on a judgment barred enforcement” because “the limitations period began to run when the Georgia trial court entered the judgment over ten years earlier.” *Id.* The judgment creditor countered that a new limitations period began in 2018, on the date when the foreign judgment was domesticated in Tennessee, so executing on the judgment lien in 2024 was timely. *Id.* Upon the judgment creditor’s appeal, this Court adjudicated the following issue of first impression: “[W]hether domestication of a foreign judgment

² “Of course, a judgment creditor may seek to extend the judgment for an additional ten years.” *Poser Invs.*, 2026 WL 880504, at *2 n.2 (citing Tenn. R. Civ. P. 69.04).

through the Uniform Act results in a new Tennessee judgment for purposes of the ten-year statute of limitations.” *Id.* at *3.

In interpreting the “clear” language of the Uniform Act, we observed that when a judgment creditor files a foreign judgment in Tennessee under the Uniform Act, “the filed foreign judgment is the functional equivalent of a new Tennessee judgment for enforcement purposes.” *Id.* The Uniform Act provides, in relevant part:

- (a) A copy of any foreign judgment authenticated in accordance with the acts of congress or the statutes of this state may be filed in the office of the clerk of any circuit or chancery court of this state.
- (b) The clerk shall treat the foreign judgment in the same manner as a judgment of a court of record of this state.
- (c) A judgment so filed has the same effect and is subject to the same procedures, defenses and proceedings for reopening, vacating, or staying as a judgment of a court of record of this state and may be enforced or satisfied in like manner.

Tenn. Code Ann. § 26-6-104(a)–(c). Based primarily upon the plain language above, we concluded “that a foreign judgment filed under the Uniform Act effectively becomes a new Tennessee judgment subject to a new ten-year enforcement period.” *Id.* at *5. We noted that this interpretation was the majority view “in multiple jurisdictions that have adopted similar versions of the Uniform Act and in federal decisions interpreting the analogous federal statute.” *Id.* Because the judgment creditor in *Poser Investments* “sought to enforce a properly domesticated foreign judgment within ten years of the date it became a Tennessee judgment,” it was not barred by Tennessee’s statute of limitations. *Id.* at *6; Tenn. Code Ann. § 28-3-110(a)(2).

Section 26-6-104’s statutory directive that the filed foreign judgment shall be treated the same as a judgment of a Tennessee court of record and our holdings in *Poser Investments* establish that a judgment domesticated in Tennessee is not derivative of the original judgment, contrary to the judgment debtor’s argument in this appeal. Rather, it “is the functional equivalent of a new Tennessee judgment for enforcement purposes.” *Poser Invs.*, 2026 WL 880504, at *3. Once properly domesticated in Tennessee, a foreign judgment may be enforced in Tennessee under Tennessee law and procedure irrespective of the laws and procedures of the state in which the foreign judgment was originally entered. In this case, the expiration of the original foreign judgment under South Carolina law after it was timely domesticated in Tennessee is irrelevant to the enforceability of the domesticated Tennessee judgment. Instead, the domesticated judgment is subject to Tennessee’s own procedures concerning enforcement or satisfaction of judgments. Tenn. Code Ann. § 26-6-104(c).

One such procedure available in Tennessee provides that within ten years from the entry of a judgment, a creditor whose judgment remains unsatisfied may file a motion to extend the judgment for another ten years, and the same procedure can be repeated within any additional ten-year period. Tenn. R. Civ. P. 69.04; *Town & Country Jewelers, Inc. v. Trotter*, 538 S.W.3d 508, 516 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2017) (time limit contained in Rule 69.04 is mandatory). The Advisory Commission comments explain that “[t]he extension procedure set out in Rule 69.04 allows the judgment creditor to avoid having the judgment become unenforceable by operation of [the general ten-year statute of limitations in] Section 28-3-110(a)(2), Tennessee Code Annotated.” Tenn. R. Civ. P. 69.04, 2016 adv. comm’n. cmt. “[I]f a filed foreign judgment under the Uniform Act is to have the ‘same effect’ as a domestic judgment, ‘it must, for . . . enforcement purposes, mean just that and not something else.’” *Poser Invs.*, 2026 WL 880504, at *5 (quoting *Stanford v. Utley*, 341 F.2d 265, 270 (8th Cir. 1965)). With all the above considerations in mind, we hold that a properly domesticated yet unsatisfied judgment is eligible for extension under Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 69.04, just as a domestic Tennessee judgment would be. We further hold that, as applied to foreign judgments, the ten-year clock under Tennessee Rule of Civil Procedure 69.04 runs from the date the foreign judgment was domesticated in Tennessee, not from the date the original judgment was entered in the foreign state.

V. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, we affirm the trial court’s judgment. The case is remanded for such further proceedings as may be necessary and consistent with this opinion. Costs of the appeal are taxed to the appellant, Derrek Pugh.

s/ John W. McClarty
JOHN W. MCCLARTY, JUDGE