IN THE COURT OF APPEALS
FIRST APPELLATE DISTRICT OF OHIO
HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO

STATE OF OHIO,	:	APPEAL NO. C-260091 TRIAL NO. B-2400375
Plaintiff-Appellee,	:	
vs.	:	*JUDGMENT ENTRY*
KHRISTIAN TRIPLETT,	:	
Defendant-Appellant.	:	

This cause was heard upon the appeal, the record, and the briefs.

For the reasons set forth in the Opinion filed this date, the judgment of the trial court is affirmed.

Further, the court holds that there were reasonable grounds for this appeal, allows no penalty, and orders that costs be taxed under App.R. 24.

The court further orders that (1) a copy of this Judgment with a copy of the Opinion attached constitutes the mandate, and (2) the mandate be sent to the trial court for execution under App.R. 27.

To the clerk:

Enter upon the journal of the court on 9/25/2026.

Pursuant to App.R. 30, the clerk is directed to send to all parties, or their counsel if represented, a copy of the court's judgment and note such action on the docket.

By: Jennifer A. Hensley
Administrative Judge

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Plaintiff-Appellee,	:	
vs.	:	
KHRISTIAN TRIPLETT,	:	*O P I N I O N*
Defendant-Appellant.	:	

Criminal Appeal From: Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas

Judgment Appealed From Is: Affirmed

Date of Judgment Entry on Appeal: September 25, 2026

Connie M. Pillich, Hamilton County Prosecuting Attorney, and *Verjine V. Adanalian*, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, for Plaintiff-Appellee,

Schuh & Goldberg, LLP, and *Brian T. Goldberg*, for Defendant-Appellant.

KINSLEY, Presiding Judge.

{¶1} A jury convicted defendant-appellant Khristian Triplett of tampering with records in violation of R.C. 2913.42(A)(1) and the illegal use of supplemental nutrition assistance program ("SNAP") benefits in violation of R.C. 2913.46(B), both felonies of the third degree. Following its verdicts, the trial court sentenced Triplett to 18 months in prison, although it quickly granted her motion for judicial release and converted her sentences to one month of community control, which she has now completed. Triplett appeals, arguing that the trial court erred in admitting the testimony of a fraud investigator and in sentencing her to prison. She also argues that her convictions are based on insufficient evidence and are against the manifest weight of the evidence. We disagree with Triplett's evidentiary challenges, as the State presented voluminous exhibits which reflected that Triplett knowingly misrepresented her employment status to a benefits caseworker. And Triplett's sentencing challenge is now moot. We accordingly affirm the judgment of the trial court.

Background

{¶2} Triplett was charged with tampering and illegal use offenses in 2024 arising from her application for SNAP benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. The case was tried to a jury beginning on February 9, 2026.

{¶3} The State presented two witnesses: Meaghan Ruehl, a senior employer relations advisor at Fifth Third Bank, and Elizabeth Newman, a fraud investigator for the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services ("HCJFS").

{¶4} Ruehl testified as to Triplett's employment and payroll history at the bank. According to Ruehl, Triplett was employed throughout 2020 and was paid biweekly. Triplett was never laid off, although she was given "nonwork paid time" at

the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that she was paid for a period of time that she was not actually working. Ruehl testified that Triplett received nonwork pay from March 30 to April 26, 2020, during which time she performed zero hours of work, and that she transitioned back to in-person employment between April 27 and May 10, 2020. Ruehl confirmed that Triplett received full-time pay every pay period from April 2020 through May 2021. Ruehl also testified that Triplett changed her address in March 2020 from Herbert Avenue to MeKeone Avenue, where it remained for at least the following year.

{¶5} A 19-year agency employee, Newman testified that HCJFS is the county agency which oversees public benefits including SNAP. Based on her extensive experience working in various positions at HCJFS, Newman explained how SNAP benefits are administered according to federal guidelines. To receive SNAP benefits, an applicant must submit an application, attend an appointment, and provide income and expense information indicating they meet federal eligibility standards.

{¶6} Newman became involved with Triplett when a caseworker referred her case to Newman for a possible fraud investigation. As a fraud investigator, Newman had access to Triplett's entire case file, which included Triplett's SNAP benefits application, the caseworker's case notes and journal entries, and letters HCJFS sent to Triplett about the status of her benefits. Triplett agreed that the documents in the case file, which were individually marked as exhibits, were admissible as HCJFS's business records, and the trial court admitted the exhibits into evidence.

{¶7} Newman reviewed many of the exhibits in the case file in detail during her testimony. Critically, Newman described for the jury the contents of Triplett's initial application for SNAP benefits, which she filed on April 9, 2020. In the application, Triplett reported that she had a biweekly gross income of $1,480 from her

employment at Fifth Third bank. According to Newman, a caseworker then followed up with Triplett on her application to conduct an intake interview, which took place on May 7, 2020. Newman displayed a journal entry from the interview for the jury. That journal entry read: "[E]mployed @ 5/3 bank but currently laid off due to Covid-19," and "Snap approved Med renewed NOA mailed out."

{¶8} Newman further testified that a caseworker input Triplett's information, which included no earned or unearned income, into a benefits calculation system on May 7. Newman showed the jury a summary of benefits document, which confirmed these amounts. Based on these documents, Newman testified that during the May 7 interview, Triplett reported that her household income was zero, even though Newman was not personally present to overhear Triplett make this representation. Defense counsel did not object to this testimony.

{¶9} According to Newman, on May 8, 2020, HCJFS mailed Triplett a notice indicating that she was approved for SNAP benefits. The second page of the letter indicated that its determination was based on Triplett's representation that she had no income. The letter also contained the following notice: "ATTENTION: If you see any information on this notice that is incorrect, please contact your county agency within 10 days of the date of this notice to correct any errors or omissions. Your benefits may be adjusted accordingly." It warned that the failure to report inaccuracies could lead to criminal prosecution.

{¶10} Newman also testified about HCJFS's interim update process, which occurred in August and September 2020. The agency sent Triplett an interim report in August directing her to report any changes to household size, expenses, or income for the purpose of determining continuing eligibility. On September 3, 2020, Triplett returned a handwritten response in which she did not report any changes to her

previous income or employment status. After receiving Triplett's September 2020 report, HCJFS continued Triplett's SNAP benefits, which subsequently increased for inflation and COVID-19, based on her original representation that she had no income. Triplett's benefits terminated at the end of March 2021 when she failed to reapply.

{¶11} After becoming involved in Triplett's case, Newman requested information from Fifth Third Bank about Triplett's employment. Based on the information she received, Newman determined that while Triplett received benefits, Triplett's income exceeded the cutoff to receive SNAP benefits for her household size, and she concluded that the total overpayment amount was $7,956, which the agency considered to be a "fraud amount."

{¶12} Newman then interviewed Triplett about the alleged fraud. During the interview, Triplett admitted that, during the benefits interview, she represented she had been laid off and was not being paid. When confronted with evidence to the contrary from Fifth Third, Triplett had no explanation. She instead responded that she "would rather go to jail" than make restitution to HCJFS for the benefits she improperly acquired. Newman admitted that HCJFS never classified Triplett's case as an intentional violation but denied that Triplett's error was inadvertent.

{¶13} Triplett testified in her own defense. She indicated that her position at Fifth Third Bank did not allow her to work remotely. Thus, when she was laid off at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, she did not believe she would be paid for her time at home. Because of this uncertainty, on April 9, 2020, she applied for SNAP benefits and reported her gross income of $1,480 per pay period, which she expected to receive within 30 days.

{¶14} Triplett further testified that she called HCJFS on April 22, 2020 and participated in an eligibility interview at that time, during which she explained that

she was still employed, but had been laid off and was unsure when she would be permitted to return to work. She denied being interviewed on May 7 or at any time after she went back to work in person.

{¶15} Triplett recalled receiving a letter sometime after the April 2020 interview, which indicated that she had been approved for benefits, but she did not read the entire letter. She did not notice the second page which listed her income as zero dollars per month.

{¶16} Triplett testified that she returned to work at Fifth Third the first week of May 2020 and acknowledged that she never informed HCJFS that she had regained full-time employment. Triplett also testified that she did not look at her paystubs, was unaware that she had been paid during the COVID-19 period, and had spoken with her manager about applying vacation pay and other benefits during that time. She explained the lack of communication based on other stressors—her mother was battling cancer and chronic pneumonia, her son moved home from college, and she and her three children had to live in a two-bedroom apartment. Originally from Chicago, Triplett lacked a local support system to help her at the time.

{¶17} Triplett acknowledged submitting a September 2020 interim report in which she did not indicate that her employment status and income had returned to full-time. Triplett also disputed Newman's characterization of the fraud interview. According to Triplett, Newman offered her a payment plan during the meeting.

{¶18} Triplett indicated that she had never been in trouble before and considered herself a rule follower. In response, the State questioned whether she recalled being arrested or cited for disorderly conduct in 1999, which she denied. Triplett also denied trying to defraud HCJFS.

{¶19} The jury found Triplett guilty of both offenses. At sentencing, the trial

court sentenced Triplett to 18 months in prison for each count, to be served concurrently, ordered restitution of $7,956, and remitted court costs. Three months later, the trial court granted Triplett judicial release and imposed one month of community control, which Triplett successfully completed on July 2, 2026.

{¶20} Triplett appealed.

Analysis

{¶21} Triplett raises three assignments of error on appeal. The first challenges aspects of Newman's testimony. The second challenges the weight and sufficiency of the evidence supporting the mens rea elements of Triplett's convictions. The third challenges the trial court's sentences. None of Triplett's arguments are meritorious.

Personal Knowledge

{¶22} In her first assignment of error, Triplett contends that the trial court abused its discretion in permitting Newman to testify about what Triplett said during the May 7 interview, when Newman was not present and therefore lacked personal knowledge of what occurred.

{¶23} We typically review a trial court's decision to admit or exclude evidence for an abuse of discretion. *State v. Fields*, 2025-Ohio-2248, ¶ 32 (1st Dist.), citing *State v. Morris*, 2012-Ohio-2407, ¶ 19. However, a party must make a timely objection to preserve an issue for appellate review. *State v. Jones*, 2026-Ohio-852, ¶ 5 (1st Dist.). "An objection will be considered timely when it is brought to the trial court's attention at a time [when] the error may be corrected." *Gilbert v. Welter*, 2025-Ohio-4887, ¶ 19 (1st Dist.), citing *Edelstein v. Edelstein*, 2025-Ohio-1514, ¶ 54 (1st Dist.). "The contemporaneous objection rule is a fundamental principle which appellate courts cannot easily disregard." *Hyams v. Cleveland Clinic Found.*, 2012-Ohio-3945, ¶ 17 (8th Dist.).

{¶24} Applying these principles, Triplett did not sufficiently object to Newman's testimony about the May 7 interview to preserve an issue for our review. The State asked Newman about the interview twice—once before asking Newman to describe what generally occurs in an intake interview and then again after Newman explained the intake process based on her 19 years of experience working at HCJFS. Triplett objected the first time the State asked Newman what Triplett said but did not object the second time. Nor did Triplett record a continuing objection or otherwise preserve an objection to the testimony. Triplett according waived all but plain error regarding Newman's answers to the May 7 interview questions. *See Jones* at ¶ 5.

{¶25} Triplett also takes issue with Newman's testimony that she did not tell HCJFS that she was working full-time while receiving SNAP benefits. Here, too, Triplett failed to contemporaneously object and therefore waived the issue. She did later object when Newman read excerpts of a letter HCJFS mailed to Triplett into the record, but that objection was specific to what the agency told Triplett, not what Triplett told it.

{¶26} "The failure to timely object waives all but plain-error review on appeal." *Jones*, 2026-Ohio-852, at ¶ 5 (1st Dist.), quoting *Kelley v. Horton*, 2025-Ohio-5252, ¶ 22 (1st Dist.). Triplett has raised no plain error argument for us to consider. Where an appellant fails to make a plain error argument on appeal, an appellate court "will not develop a plain error argument for [her]," and we decline to do so here. *State v. Ullman*, 2022-Ohio-4683, ¶ 18 (9th Dist.).

{¶27} Triplett's first assignment of error is overruled.

Weight and Sufficiency of the Evidence

{¶28} In her second assignment of error, Triplett challenges the sufficiency of the evidence supporting her convictions and argues that her convictions were against

the manifest weight of the evidence. In particular, she argues that the State failed to prove that she possessed the requisite mens rea for the offenses. This argument is largely based on the timing of the intake interview, at which Triplett concedes she reported she had been laid off and was not earning income. Triplett argues the interview took place in late April 2020, when she was required to stay home from Fifth Third Bank due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the evidence shows otherwise.

{¶29} To assess whether a conviction is supported by sufficient evidence, we ask "whether after reviewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, any rational trier of fact could have found all the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt." *State v. Powell*, 2020-Ohio-4283, ¶ 16 (1st Dist.), citing *State v. Jenks*, 61 Ohio St.3d 259 (1991), paragraph two of the syllabus. "Where reasonable minds can reach different conclusions upon conflicting evidence, determination as to what occurred is a question for the trier of fact. It is not the function of an appellate court to substitute its judgment for that of the factfinder." *State v. Gurung*, 2024-Ohio-3202, ¶ 19 (1st Dist.).

{¶30} By contrast, a manifest-weight challenge requires us to independently "weigh[] the evidence and all reasonable inferences, consider[] the credibility of witnesses, and determine[] whether in resolving conflicts in the evidence, the jury clearly lost its way and created such a manifest miscarriage of justice that the conviction must be reversed and a new trial ordered." *State v. Reillo*, Slip Opinion No. 2026-Ohio-2701, ¶ 26, quoting *State v. Brown*, 2025-Ohio-2804, ¶ 30. We afford substantial deference to the credibility determinations of the trier of fact because the trier directly observes the witnesses during trial proceedings. *Id.* at ¶ 28. "Accordingly, reversal on manifest weight grounds is warranted only in the exceptional case in which the evidence weighs heavily against the conviction." (Cleaned up.) *State*

v. Estill, 2026-Ohio-2101, ¶ 38 (1st Dist.), quoting *State v. Martin*, 20 Ohio App.3d 172, 175 (1st Dist. 1983).

{¶31} The offense of tampering with records under R.C. 2913.42(A)(1) requires the State to prove that a person acted "with the purpose to defraud or knowing that the person is facilitating a fraud." The offense of illegal use of SNAP benefits under R.C. 2913.46 requires the State to prove that a person acted knowingly, which is defined as being "aware that the person's conduct will probably cause a certain result." R.C. 2901.22(B). Triplett argues that the State failed to establish these mental states, in large part because the caseworker who conducted the intake interview did not testify. We disagree with this assertion.

{¶32} "Culpable mental states are frequently demonstrated through circumstantial evidence." (Cleaned up.) *State v. Pride*, 2026-Ohio-3328, ¶ 19 (1st Dist.), citing *State v. Thomas*, 2025-Ohio-1767, ¶ 22 (2d Dist.). "A defendant's state of mind may be inferred from the totality of the circumstances." *Id.*, citing *State v. Murphy*, 2018-Ohio-3506, ¶ 16 (2d Dist.). Even without direct testimony from the caseworker, the State presented an abundance of evidence from which the jury could infer that Triplett acted knowingly and with the purpose to defraud HCJFS.

{¶33} First, the State introduced voluminous documentary evidence from HCJFS's case file. These exhibits included a journal entry from the May 7 interview, which reflected the date of the interview and that Triplett was "currently laid off due to Covid-19;" an HCJFS benefits summary, which indicated a "run date" of May 7 and reflected that Triplett's income was zero; and a notice dated May 8, 2020 informing Triplett that her SNAP benefits application had been approved. These exhibits were significant, because Triplett herself admitted that she returned to full-time, in-person work by the end of April 2020, and Fifth Third's payroll records established that she

was also transitioning out of nonwork pay status at that time. The exhibits therefore support the jury's conclusion that Triplett knowingly represented to an HCJFS caseworker in May that she was laid off when that was not in fact true.

{¶34} Further, Triplett herself acknowledged in her testimony that she completed a telephonic eligibility interview during which she reported that she was laid off and did not know when she would return to work. Although Triplett disputed the timing of the conversation, Triplett's admission that the conversation took place supports the jury's conclusion that she was aware of the untruthfulness of her assertion when she made it. And Triplett admitted that she returned an interim report in September 2020 without alerting HCJFS that she was no longer laid off.

{¶35} In addition, Newman testified that when she met with Triplett for the fraud interview, Triplett acknowledged that she reported being laid off and not getting paid when she was interviewed the month after applying for benefits. According to Newman's testimony, this interview took place in May of 2020, after Triplett had returned to work at Fifth Third. Fifth Third's payroll witness also testified that Triplett received a paycheck for the entire benefits period and that her income was never zero.

{¶36} Viewed in the light most favorable to the State, this evidence was sufficient to prove that Triplett acted with the requisite purpose and knowledge required by each statute. *See Powell*, 2020-Ohio-4283, at ¶ 16 (1st Dist.). Although the jury did not hear directly from the caseworker, they could reasonably infer Triplett's mental state from this extensive circumstantial evidence. *See Pride*, 2026-Ohio-3328, at ¶ 19 (1st Dist.). There was sufficient evidence from which the jury could infer that Triplett falsified the data she provided to HCJFS with the purpose of defrauding it and that Triplett knowingly accepted SNAP benefits in an unauthorized manner.

{¶37} Triplett's convictions were also not against the manifest weight of the evidence. We sympathize with the unique demands Triplett faced at the time she sought and received SNAP benefits, and we agree that Triplett testified about her lack of intent to defraud HCJFS. But these are matters of credibility for the jury to weigh, because the jury "directly observe[d] the witnesses during trial proceedings." *See Glover*, 2019-Ohio-5211, at ¶ 30 (1st Dist.). As this is not the "exceptional case in which the evidence weighs heavily against the conviction[s]," we defer to the jury's determination. *Estill*, 2026-Ohio-2101, at ¶ 38 (1st Dist.).

{¶38} Triplett's second assignment of error is overruled.

Sentencing

{¶39} In her third assignment of error, Triplett argues that the trial court imposed a harsher sentence because she elected to exercise her right to a jury trial. Triplett has fully served her sentence in this case. She was released from prison through a judicial release order and has completed her one-month term of community control. Thus, this issue is moot. *State v. Alanani*, 2024-Ohio-5660, ¶ 21 (1st Dist.) ("A defendant's challenge to the length of a sentence is moot where the defendant has served the entire sentence before an appellate court hears the appeal."). We therefore decline to consider Triplett's third assignment of error.

Conclusion

{¶40} Triplett waived her evidentiary challenge to Newman's testimony, and her sentencing challenge is moot. Triplett's convictions are supported by sufficient evidence and are not against the manifest weight of the evidence. We accordingly affirm the judgment of the trial court.

Judgment affirmed.

BOCK and **MOORE, JJ.,** concur.