The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously (**9-0**) in ***Ruan v. United States*** (decided June 27, 2022) that to convict a doctor of unlawful controlled substance distribution under the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. § 841), the government must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the physician **knowingly or intentionally** acted in an unauthorized manner.

## Key Details of the Ruling

- **The Core Question:** The case (consolidated with *Kahn v. United States*) asked whether the statute's "knowingly or intentionally" mental state requirement ("mens rea") applies to the "except as authorized" clause of 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1).
- **The Holding:** Justice Stephen Breyer, writing for the Court, held that once a defendant produces evidence that a prescription was authorized, the government must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the doctor knew they were acting outside the scope of professional practice (or subjectively intended to do so).
- **Rejection of Objective Standards:** The Court rejected lower-court instructions that allowed juries to convict doctors based on an objective "good faith" or reasonable standard of medical practice. Wrongdoing must be conscious to trigger criminal penalties under the statute.
- **Outcome:** The Supreme Court vacated the convictions of doctors Xiulu Ruan and Shakeel Kahn and remanded the cases back to the lower courts for new trials consistent with the subjective standard.

1. The full decision via the Supreme Court Opinion PDF
2. Review SCOTUSblog's Ruan v. United States Page.