

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
OHIO, WESTERN DIVISION

Manuel Mendonca v. Warden, Madison Correctional Institution

Mendonca · No. 1:24-cv-717 · Decided December 30, 2025

SUMMARY

This Report and Recommendation addresses Manuel Mendonca’s petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The Magistrate Judge recommends denying the petition and dismissing the action, concluding that the Fourth Amendment claim was barred by *Stone v. Powell* because Mendonca had a full and fair opportunity to litigate it in state court, and that the sufficiency-of-the-evidence claim was procedurally defaulted and lacked merit. The Magistrate Judge also recommends declining to issue a certificate of appealability.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Western Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Elizabeth A. Preston Deavers
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Western Division
DECIDED	December 30, 2025
DOCKET	1:24-cv-717
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Report and recommendation on a state prisoner’s petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The magistrate judge recommended denial of the petition, dismissal of the action, and denial of a certificate of appealability.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under AEDPA, habeas relief is unavailable for a claim adjudicated on the merits in state court unless the state decision was contrary to, or involved an unreasonable application of, clearly established Supreme Court law, or was based on an unreasonable determination of the facts. State factual findings receive a presumption of correctness rebuttable by clear and convincing evidence. Sufficiency-of-the-evidence claims are reviewed under <i>Jackson v. Virginia</i> with double deference to the jury’s verdict and the state appellate court’s determination. Fourth Amendment claims are generally barred from federal habeas review

	when the state provided a full and fair opportunity to litigate them under <i>Stone v. Powell</i> .
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Manuel Mendonca v. Warden, Madison Correctional Institution

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus fourth amendment search and seizure suppression of evidence due process

PRACTICE AREAS

federal habeas corpus criminal procedure constitutional law post-conviction relief

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the federal habeas court could review Mendonca’s Fourth Amendment challenge to the inventory search when Ohio courts provided him a full and fair opportunity to litigate the claim.
2. Whether Mendonca’s sufficiency-of-the-evidence claim was procedurally defaulted because he failed to present it to the Supreme Court of Ohio.
3. Whether, alternatively, the state appellate court’s determination that the evidence was sufficient under *Jackson v. Virginia* was unreasonable under AEDPA.
4. Whether a manifest-weight-of-the-evidence claim is cognizable in federal habeas corpus.

HOLDINGS

1. The Fourth Amendment claim is not subject to federal habeas relief because Ohio provided Mendonca a full and fair opportunity to litigate the alleged unconstitutional search and seizure.
2. Mendonca’s sufficiency-of-the-evidence claim was procedurally defaulted because he raised it in the Ohio Court of Appeals but did not present it to the Supreme Court of Ohio, and he no longer could do so.
3. Even if the sufficiency claim were exhausted, the state appellate court reasonably determined that the evidence was sufficient to support Mendonca’s convictions.
4. To the extent Mendonca asserted a manifest-weight-of-the-evidence claim, that claim was not cognizable in federal habeas corpus.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“An “‘opportunity for full and fair consideration’ means an available avenue for the prisoner to present his claim to the state courts, not an inquiry into the adequacy of the procedure actually used to resolve that particular claim.”” (Section III.A)

“This Court sitting in federal habeas review owes a double layer of deference to these determinations” (Section III.B)

“For these reasons, the Undersigned RECOMMENDS that Petitioner’s grounds for relief be denied, and this action be DISMISSED.” (Section IV)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

During a traffic stop of Mendonca’s rental car, an officer discovered that Mendonca’s license was suspended and that the vehicle’s registration and insurance were expired. The officer impounded the vehicle pursuant to the police department’s towing and release policy and conducted an inventory search, finding a small quantity of cocaine in the passenger compartment and a large brick of cocaine hidden in the trunk. A subsequent search of the transporting officer’s cruiser revealed methamphetamine near the area where Mendonca had been seated. The state trial court denied suppression, and a jury convicted Mendonca of four drug offenses and imposed an aggregate sentence of 13 to 16.5 years.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Mendonca was convicted in Ohio state court of drug-trafficking and drug-possession offenses after cocaine and methamphetamine were discovered during an inventory search of his rental vehicle and a police cruiser. The Ohio trial court denied his motion to suppress, and the Ohio Court of Appeals affirmed his convictions and sentence. The Supreme Court of Ohio declined jurisdiction over his Fourth Amendment claim. Mendonca then filed a federal habeas petition asserting Fourth Amendment and sufficiency-of-the-evidence claims; the magistrate judge recommended dismissal of both claims.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Burt v. Titlow, 571 U.S. 12, 19-20 (2013)
- Harrington v. Richter, 562 U.S. 86, 100, 102 (2011)
- Renico v. Lett, 559 U.S. 766, 773 (2010)
- Bell v. Cone, 535 U.S. 685, 694 (2002)
- Williams v. Taylor, 529 U.S. 362, 405-06, 412-13 (2000)
- Lang v. Bobby, 889 F.3d 803, 810 (6th Cir. 2018)
- Wood v. Allen, 558 U.S. 290, 301 (2010)
- Moritz v. Woods, 692 F. App’x 249, 254 (6th Cir. 2017)
- Pouncy v. Palmer, 846 F.3d 144, 158 (6th Cir. 2017)
- Ayers v. Hudson, 623 F.3d 301, 308 (6th Cir. 2010)
- Miller-El v. Cockrell, 537 U.S. 322, 340 (2003)
- Cullen v. Pinholster, 563 U.S. 170, 181 (2011)
- Stone v. Powell, 428 U.S. 465, 481-82 (1976)
- Seymour v. Walker, 224 F.3d 542, 553 (6th Cir. 2000)

- Good v. Berghuis, 729 F.3d 636, 639 (6th Cir. 2013)
- Stermer v. Warren, 959 F.3d 704, 720 (6th Cir. 2020)
- Coleman v. Thompson, 501 U.S. 722, 731-32, 750 (1991)
- Rayner v. Mills, 685 F.3d 631, 643 (6th Cir. 2012)
- O’Sullivan v. Boerckel, 526 U.S. 838, 847-48 (1999)
- Franklin v. Bradshaw, 695 F.3d 439, 449 (6th Cir. 2012)
- Schlup v. Delo, 513 U.S. 298, 324 (1995)
- Ian Davis v. Margaret Bradshaw, Davis v. Bradshaw, 900 F.3d 315, 326 (6th Cir. 2018)
- Carter v. Mitchell, 443 F.3d 517, 538 (6th Cir. 2006)
- Bousley v. United States, 523 U.S. 614, 623 (1998)
- Wright v. West, 505 U.S. 277, 296-97 (1992)
- Brown v. Konteh, 567 F.3d 191, 204-05 (6th Cir. 2009)
- White v. Steele, 602 F.3d 707, 710 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Saxton v. Sheets, 547 F.3d 597, 606 (6th Cir. 2008)
- United States v. Kelley, 461 F.3d 817, 825 (6th Cir. 2006)
- Gipson v. Sheldon, 659 F. App’x 871, 877 (6th Cir. 2016)
- Dell v. Straub, 194 F. Supp. 2d 629, 647-48 (E.D. Mich. Feb. 28, 2002)
- Gonzalez v. Reiner, 177 F. Supp. 2d 211, 218 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 13, 2001)
- Thomas v. Taskila, No. 23-1423, 2023 U.S. App. LEXIS 30660, at *17 (6th Cir. Nov. 16, 2023)
- Estelle v. McGuire, 502 U.S. 62, 67-68 (1991)
- Nash v. Eberlin, 258 F. App’x 761, 764 n.4 (6th Cir. 2007)
- Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000)
- Barefoot v. Estelle, 463 U.S. 880, 893 n.4 (1983)
- Miller-El v. Cockrell, 537 U.S. 322, 336 (2003)
- Moody v. United States, 958 F.3d 485, 488 (6th Cir. 2020)
- Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985)
- United States v. Walters, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981)
- State v. Mendonca, 2023-Ohio-1780, 2023 WL 3700578 (Ohio Ct. App. May 30, 2023)
- State v. Mendonca, 217 N.E.3d 815, 171 Ohio St. 3d 1437, 2023-Ohio-3328 (Ohio Sept. 26, 2023)