

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Ronald L. Seay v. G. Helena and Stephen White

Seay v. Helena · No. 2:25-cv-0503-DJC-JDP (P) · Decided April 30, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California dismissed Ronald L. Seay’s 28 U.S.C. § 2254 petition after preliminary review because it was filed on a § 1983 form, did not identify sufficient information about the underlying conviction or exhaustion, and presented a vague claim concerning sentencing enhancements. The court granted leave to amend, granted the petitioner’s second application to proceed in forma pauperis, and denied the first application as moot.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jeremy D. Peterson, United States Magistrate Judge
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	April 30, 2025
DOCKET	2:25-cv-0503-DJC-JDP (P)
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Preliminary screening of a state prisoner's 28 U.S.C. § 2254 habeas petition under Rule 4 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under Rule 4 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases, the court conducts preliminary screening and may dismiss a habeas petition when it plainly appears that the petitioner is not entitled to relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court order
PARTIES	Ronald L. Seay v. G. Helena, Stephen White

TOPICS

- [federal habeas corpus](#) [post-conviction relief](#) [pleadings](#) [prisoners rights](#) [civil procedure](#)

PRACTICE AREAS

- [federal habeas corpus](#) [post-conviction relief](#) [civil procedure](#) [prisoners rights](#)

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the petition should be dismissed at preliminary review under Rule 4 because it fails to present a viable federal habeas claim.
2. Whether petitioner should be granted leave to amend the deficient petition.
3. Whether petitioner should be granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis on the second application and whether the first application should be denied as moot.

HOLDINGS

1. A § 2254 petition may be dismissed at preliminary review when it plainly appears that the petitioner is not entitled to habeas relief. Because this petition was vague, failed to identify essential information about the conviction and exhaustion, and did not substantiate the alleged improper sentencing enhancements, dismissal was warranted.
2. The deficient petition should be dismissed with leave to amend rather than dismissed finally, allowing petitioner an opportunity to address the deficiencies and explain why the action should proceed.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Under Rule 4, the judge assigned to the habeas proceeding must examine the habeas petition and order a response to the petition unless it “plainly appears” that the petitioner is not entitled to relief.” (at 1)

“Within thirty days from service of this order, petitioner shall file either (1) an amended petition or (2) notice of voluntary dismissal of this action without prejudice.” (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Ronald L. Seay, a state prisoner, alleged that the court that convicted him imposed enhancements to a life sentence without the possibility of parole because of malice, spite, and excessive racial prejudice. He did not identify when the underlying conviction occurred, explain whether he had exhausted his state-court remedies, or provide a factual basis showing how he knew the enhancements were imposed for improper reasons. The petition was submitted on a § 1983 form rather than a habeas petition form.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Petitioner filed a § 2254 petition using a § 1983 form and applied to proceed in forma pauperis. On preliminary review, the court found that the petition did not present a viable federal habeas claim because it did not identify when the underlying conviction occurred, whether the claim had been exhausted, or the factual basis for the alleged improper sentencing enhancements. The court dismissed the petition with leave to amend, granted the second in forma pauperis application, denied the first as moot, and allowed thirty days to file an amended petition or a notice of voluntary dismissal.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Valdez v. Montgomery, 918 F.3d 687, 693 (9th Cir. 2019)
- Boyd v. Thompson, 147 F.3d 1124, 1127 (9th Cir. 1998)

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