

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Randle v. Contra Costa County Superior Court

No. 24-cv-07930-RFL (N.D. Cal. Mar. 31, 2025) · No. 24-cv-07930-RFL · Decided March 31, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California reopened Ramello Randle’s federal habeas action after granting his motion to proceed in forma pauperis. The court dismissed the petition with leave to amend because the claims appeared unexhausted in state court and allowed Randle to seek a stay under the applicable habeas procedures. The court set April 28, 2025, as the deadline for filing an amended petition or a motion for a stay.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Rita F. Lin
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	March 31, 2025
DOCKET	24-cv-07930-RFL
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner sought federal habeas relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The action had previously been dismissed without prejudice for failure to pay the filing fee or seek in forma pauperis status. The court granted petitioner's in forma pauperis motion, reopened the action, vacated the prior dismissal and judgment, and dismissed the habeas petition with leave to amend or seek a stay.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. §§ 2254(a) and 2243, the district court may consider a state-prisoner habeas petition only if custody allegedly violates the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States, and may summarily dismiss only when the petition's allegations are vague or conclusory, palpably incredible, patently frivolous, or false.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished, nonprecedential district-court order
PARTIES	Ramello Randle v. Contra Costa County Superior Court

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus

post-conviction relief

pleadings

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

federal habeas corpus

state post-conviction relief

civil procedure

criminal procedure

constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the federal habeas petition could proceed when petitioner had not presented his claims to the California Supreme Court or otherwise exhausted available state remedies.
2. Whether petitioner should be permitted to amend the petition or seek a stay and abeyance while pursuing state-court exhaustion.
3. Whether the action should be reopened and the prior dismissal and judgment vacated after petitioner filed a motion to proceed in forma pauperis.

HOLDINGS

1. A state prisoner must present to the California Supreme Court the claims he seeks to raise in federal habeas proceedings, and a petition containing unexhausted claims must generally be dismissed.
2. A district court may stay a petition containing only unexhausted claims under the circumstances identified in *Rhines v. Weber*, including good cause for failing to exhaust, potentially meritorious claims, and the absence of intentional dilatory conduct.
3. The action should be reopened, the prior dismissal and judgment vacated, and petitioner's motion to proceed in forma pauperis granted after petitioner filed the required motion following the prior dismissal.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Summary dismissal is appropriate only where the allegations in the petition are vague or conclusory, palpably incredible, or patently frivolous or false.” (Discussion § A)

“Before he may challenge either the fact or length of his confinement in a habeas petition in this Court, Petitioner must present to the California Supreme Court any claims he wishes to raise in this Court.”

(Discussion § B)

“The petition is DISMISSED with leave to file an amended petition or a motion for a stay on or before April 28, 2025.” (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

A California jury found Ramello Randle guilty of murder with the special circumstance of lying in wait. The Contra Costa County Superior Court sentenced him to life without the possibility of parole and 115 years on September 24, 2024. Randle filed his federal habeas petition on the sentencing date, before pursuing an appeal or any state-court habeas petition. The petition asserted an illegal and racially discriminatory sentence, ineffective assistance of trial counsel and denial of different counsel, and suppression of critical evidence under *Brady v. Maryland*.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A jury convicted petitioner in Contra Costa County of murder with the special circumstance of lying in wait, and he was sentenced to life without parole plus 115 years. He submitted a federal habeas petition to the Ninth Circuit on the date of sentencing; the Ninth Circuit transferred it to the district court. The district court initially dismissed the action without prejudice for failure to pay the filing fee or move to proceed in forma pauperis. After petitioner filed an in forma pauperis motion, the court reopened the action and dismissed the petition with leave to amend because the claims appeared entirely unexhausted.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Rose v. Hodges, 423 U.S. 19, 21 (1975)
- Hendricks v. Vasquez, 908 F.2d 490, 491 (9th Cir. 1990)
- Blackledge v. Allison, 431 U.S. 63, 75-76 (1977)
- Rose v. Lundy, 455 U.S. 509, 522 (1982)
- Gatlin v. Madding, 189 F.3d 882, 889 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Brown v. Maass, 11 F.3d 914, 915 (9th Cir. 1993)
- Rhines v. Weber, 544 U.S. 269, 277-78 (2005)
- Mena v. Long, 813 F.3d 907, 909 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963)