

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA

Shayne Avery Guest v. Chadwick S. Dotson

Guest v. Dotson · No. 7:25-cv-00695 · Decided December 22, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia dismissed Shayne Avery Guest’s 28 U.S.C. § 2254 habeas petition as untimely under the one-year limitation period in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d). The court held that Guest’s actual-innocence argument was unsupported by new reliable evidence and that Martinez v. Ryan could not excuse the statutory filing deadline.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Michael F. Urbanski
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia
DECIDED	December 22, 2025
DOCKET	7:25-cv-00695
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 challenging a Virginia state conviction; the district court dismissed the petition as untimely.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the statutory one-year limitations period for federal habeas petitions and assessed whether statutory tolling, the actual-innocence gateway, or equitable tolling excused the untimely filing.
PARTIES	Shayne Avery Guest v. Chadwick S. Dotson

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

- Whether Guest’s § 2254 petition was timely under the one-year statute of limitations in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1).
- Whether statutory tolling under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2) rendered the petition timely.
- Whether Guest’s actual-innocence claim established a gateway exception to the limitations period.
- Whether the equitable exception recognized in Martinez v. Ryan excused the untimely filing.
- Whether Guest’s alleged lack of understanding of the limitations period warranted equitable tolling.

HOLDINGS

1. The petition was untimely under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1)(A) because Guest's conviction became final on January 3, 2019, and he did not execute the federal petition until September 23, 2025.
2. Guest did not satisfy the actual-innocence gateway because he relied on the evidence presented at trial and identified no new reliable evidence showing that no reasonable juror would have convicted him.
3. The equitable exception recognized in *Martinez v. Ryan* does not excuse an untimely federal habeas petition because *Martinez* applies to certain procedural defaults, not to the statutory limitations period in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d).
4. Guest's asserted lack of understanding of how the statute of limitations operated did not entitle him to equitable tolling.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“actual innocence, if proved, serves as a gateway through which a petitioner may pass whether the impediment is a procedural bar [or the] expiration of the statute of limitations.”

“A petitioner does not meet the threshold requirement unless he persuades the district court that, in light of the new evidence, no juror, acting reasonably,”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Guest was convicted in Virginia of raping a child under thirteen and received an active twenty-year sentence on February 22, 2017. His direct appeal concluded with the Supreme Court of Virginia's denial of rehearing on October 5, 2018, and his state habeas proceedings concluded with the refusal of review on March 23, 2023. He filed the federal § 2254 petition on September 23, 2025, asserting ineffective assistance of counsel, insufficiency of the evidence, actual innocence, and reliance on *Martinez v. Ryan*. He identified no new evidence supporting factual innocence.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Guest was convicted and sentenced in the Circuit Court of Charlotte County, Virginia, and his direct-review proceedings concluded when the Supreme Court of Virginia denied rehearing on October 5, 2018. He later pursued state habeas relief, which was denied by the Circuit Court of Charlotte County and whose appeal was refused by the Supreme Court of Virginia on March 23, 2023. Guest executed the federal § 2254 petition on September 23, 2025. The district court dismissed the petition because it was filed outside the federal one-year limitations period and neither actual innocence nor *Martinez*-based equitable relief excused the untimeliness.

DISPOSITION

dismissed