

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

Jafarnia Williams v. Superintendent Rockview SCI; Attorney General of Pennsylvania

Jafarnia Williams · No. No. 23-1306 · Decided June 15, 2026

SUMMARY

The Third Circuit affirmed the denial of Jafarnia Williams’s motion under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b) to reopen the dismissal of his habeas petition. The court held that the untimely claim of mistake could not be recast under Rule 60(b)(6), and that a change in procedural case law, without supporting extraordinary circumstances or extreme hardship, was insufficient for relief. The court also concluded that remand was unnecessary because Williams had not properly presented facts supporting equitable relief.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Judge Bibas; Judge Restrepo; Judge Fisher
JURISDICTION	United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit
DECIDED	June 15, 2026
DOCKET	No. 23-1306
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Williams appealed the Western District of Pennsylvania's denial of his Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b) motion seeking to reopen the dismissal of a second-in-time federal habeas petition. The Third Circuit granted a certificate of appealability and affirmed.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The denial of a Rule 60(b) motion is reviewed for abuse of discretion. The Court may affirm on any ground supported by the record, including grounds not reached by the District Court, and may determine from the appellate record that extraordinary circumstances cannot be shown as a matter of law.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published precedential opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit
PARTIES	Jafarnia Williams, a/k/a Jeff Schirone Williams v. Superintendent Rockview SCI, Attorney General of Pennsylvania

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus

successive petitions

post-conviction relief

motion for reconsideration

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Federal habeas corpus

Post-conviction relief

Appellate procedure

Civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a Rule 60(b)(6) motion to reopen a final habeas judgment may be granted when the movant relies principally on a subsequent procedural interpretation of existing law.
2. Whether the District Court's failure to expressly weigh the equitable factors relevant to Rule 60(b)(6) required a remand.
3. Whether Williams's Rule 60(b)(1) motion was timely and, if not, whether it could properly succeed under Rule 60(b)(6).

HOLDINGS

1. A change in law, without supporting equitable circumstances, does not by itself establish the extraordinary circumstances or extreme and unexpected hardship required for Rule 60(b)(6) relief. A new precedent may be one factor, but it cannot be the dispositive factor unless it falls within a recognized retroactivity exception.
2. Remand was not required because the appellate record established as a matter of law that Williams could not show extraordinary circumstances.
3. Williams's Rule 60(b)(1) claim was untimely, and the motion could not be recast as a successful Rule 60(b)(6) motion because it alleged only an asserted legal mistake based on a later procedural interpretation and no exceptional circumstances.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Rule 60(b)(6) is available only in narrow circumstances; its standard is “stringent” and “very strict.”” (5)

“But it cannot suffice as the dispositive factor, amounting to extraordinary circumstances all on its own, unless it falls within a retroactivity exception.” (7)

“Under 60(b)(6), that is insufficient as a matter of law.” (10)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Williams was convicted in Pennsylvania in 2007 and sentenced to fifteen to thirty years in prison. After collateral proceedings concerning time-served credit, the Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas issued a 2013 document modifying his sentence, and the Superior Court affirmed the current sentence while leaving the credit intact. Williams later filed a federal habeas petition challenging his convictions and a sentence enhancement, arguing that the 2013 modification was a new judgment under Magwood; that petition was dismissed as second

or successive. Years later, he sought to reopen that dismissal based on subsequent Third Circuit precedent, but his motion alleged no hardship, extraordinary circumstances, diligence, actual innocence, death sentence, or developed merits showing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Williams's 2013 federal habeas petition was dismissed as second or successive after the magistrate judge concluded that a Pennsylvania sentence modification was not a new judgment. Williams did not appeal that dismissal, but later sought authorization to file additional successive petitions and pursued related appellate relief, all unsuccessful. In 2022, he moved under Rule 60(b)(1) to reopen the dismissal based on *Magwood v. Patterson* and *Lesko v. Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections*. Because the motion was untimely under Rule 60(b)(1), the magistrate judge recharacterized it under Rule 60(b)(6); the District Court denied relief, and the Third Circuit affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- *Magwood v. Patterson*, 561 U.S. 320, 341-42 (2010)
- *Lesko v. Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections*, 34 F.4th 211, 225 (3d Cir. 2022)
- *Cox v. Horn*, 757 F.3d 113, 115, 118, 121-26 (3d Cir. 2014)
- *Pioneer Investment Services Co. v. Brunswick Associates Limited Partnership*, 507 U.S. 380, 393 (1993)
- *BLOM Bank SAL v. Honickman*, 605 U.S. 204, 211, 213-14 (2025)
- *Kemp v. United States*, 596 U.S. 528, 538, 540 (2022)
- *Gonzalez v. Crosby*, 545 U.S. 524, 531, 535-36 (2005)
- *Sawka v. Healtheast, Inc.*, 989 F.2d 138, 140 (3d Cir. 1993)
- *Satterfield v. District Attorney Philadelphia*, 872 F.3d 152, 161-64 (3d Cir. 2017)
- *Polites v. United States*, 364 U.S. 426, 433 (1960)
- *Teague v. Lane*, 489 U.S. 288, 307 (1989)
- *Edwards v. Vannoy*, *Edwards v. Vannoy*, 593 U.S. 255, 272 (2021)
- *Reynoldsville Casket Co. v. Hyde*, 514 U.S. 749, 758-59 (1995)
- *Rutherford v. United States*, 608 U.S. ___, 146 S. Ct. 1320, 1331-32 (2026)
- *Fernandez v. United States*, 608 U.S. ___, 146 S. Ct. 1292, 1304 (2026)
- *Bracey v. Superintendent Rockview SCI*, 986 F.3d 274, 295-97 (3d Cir. 2021)
- *Downey v. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections*, 968 F.3d 299, 309 (3d Cir. 2020)
- *Lackawanna County District Attorney v. Coss*, 532 U.S. 394, 404 (2001)
- *Mala v. Crown Bay Marina, Inc.*, 704 F.3d 239, 245 (3d Cir. 2013)
- *Higgs v. Attorney General of the United States*, 655 F.3d 333, 339 (3d Cir. 2011), as amended (Sept. 19, 2011)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT No. 23-1306 JAFARNIA WILLIAMS, a/k/a Jeff Schirone Williams, Appellant v. SUPERINTENDENT ROCKVIEW SCI; ATTORNEY GENERAL OF PENNSYLVANIA _____ On Appeal from the U.S. District Court, W.D. Pa. Judge David S. Cercone, No. 2:13-cv-01171 Before: RESTREPO, BIBAS, and FISHER, Circuit Judges Argued: Apr.

20, 2026; Filed: June 15, 2026 _____ OPINION OF THE COURT BIBAS, Circuit Judge. The writ of habeas corpus is an exception to ordinary rules of finality; it gives prisoners a second bite at the apple. Rule 60(b) motions for relief from judgment do the same. When a prisoner tries to use that Rule to reopen a habeas petition, courts must be careful lest there be no apple left.

Jafarnia Williams has tried to file successive habeas petitions many times over. Years later, after those efforts failed, he turned to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b) to reopen those claims. But Rule 60(b)(1) has a one-year time limit, and Rule 60(b)(6) requires him to show extreme or unusual hardship from extraordinary circumstances.

Because he has not met that demanding standard, we will AFFIRM the denial of his motion to reopen. I. WILLIAMS’S REPEATED COLLATERAL ATTACKS In 2007, Jafarnia Williams was convicted of kidnapping, corruption of a minor, and several drug crimes. He was sentenced to fifteen to thirty years in Pennsylvania state prison, with some credit for time served on other crimes.

Williams thought he deserved more time-served credit. So, after exhausting his ordinary appeals, he embarked on an odyssey through Pennsylvania and federal collateral review. First, he filed a federal habeas petition, which was dismissed without a certificate of appealability. Then he petitioned under Pennsylvania’s Post-Conviction Relief Act (PCRA).

The Commonwealth’s lawyer conceded that if Williams’s view of the facts was right, “he would be entitled to” more credit against his sentence. App. 57. So the Superior Court remanded for a hearing “to determine whether or not he would be entitled to that credit time for [the] sentence.” App. 55–56.

On remand, the Court of Common Pleas partly agreed with Williams. The court was “not satisfied that three months and twelve days” that Williams was owed had, in fact, been credited. App. 78. So it issued a document titled “SENTENCE MODIFIED 6-26-13 FOR TIME CREDIT,” providing that Williams “is hereby sentenced by this Court as follows” and resentencing him on all counts, listing the days for which he “shall receive credit for time served.” App.

88–89. Williams appealed his new sentence, seeking still more time-served 2 credit. But the Superior Court affirmed his “current sentence.” App. 288. Though it rejected Williams’s “incorrect premise” that he was “legally entitled to any credit for time served on his prior sentence,” it declined to disrupt the lower court’s ruling crediting him with three months and twelve days.

App. 287–88 (emphasis in original). So Williams filed another PCRA petition challenging his 2013 sentence; that was denied and then affirmed on the merits. Also in 2013, Williams filed another federal habeas petition challenging his convictions and a sentence enhancement, but not his time-served credits. That petition underlies the motion that is before us today.

Williams argued that his 2013 sentence was a “new judgment,” so his second-in-time federal habeas petition challenging it was not barred as second or successive under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(b). App. 1551 (relying on *Magwood v. Patterson*, 561 U.S. 320 (2010)). A magistrate judge disagreed, viewing the updated sentence not as a true resentencing but rather a “modification ... somewhat akin to correction of a clerical error in a judgment.” App.

1557. The magistrate recommended dismissing the petition as second or successive, and the District Court did so. Williams did not ask our Court to review that decision. Instead, he twice asked our Court for leave to file another second or successive petition, filed a third federal habeas petition, and applied for a certificate of appealability regarding his third petition; all were denied.

In 2022, eight years after his 2013 federal habeas petition was dismissed as second or successive, Williams moved to reopen that dismissal under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 360(b)(1), rehashing his earlier claim that the judge had “mistakenly” refused to treat his 2013 resentencing as a new judgment under *Magwood v. Patterson*, 561 U.S. 320 (2010). App.

1564. But (b)(1) has a one-year time limit, dooming his claim. See R. 60(c)(1). So the magistrate judge charitably recharacterized his motion as under (b)(6)’s catchall for “any other reason that justifies relief,” which has a more forgiving time limit. R. 60(b)(6), (c)(1). Then the magistrate judge concluded, and the District Court agreed, that the 2013 resentencing was not a new sentence because it did not affect the legality of the original one.

We granted a certificate of appealability. II. OUR NEW PROCEDURAL RULING IS NOT ENOUGH TO REOPEN THE CASE Rule 60(b) is a narrow exception to finality. It lets a party move for relief from a judgment based on five enumerated grounds: mistake, new evidence, fraud, voidness, or satisfaction of the judgment. R. 60(b)(1)–(5). If none of those categories fits, there is an equitable catchall at the end of the Rule: “any other reason that justifies relief.” R. 60(b)(6).

Instead of the one-year time limit for motions based on the first three grounds, 60(b)(6) motions need only “be made within a reasonable time.” R. 60(c)(1). We review the denial of a 60(b) motion for abuse of discretion. *Cox v. Horn*, 757 F.3d 113, 118 (3d Cir. 2014).

In 2010, before Williams’s latest sentence, the Supreme Court ruled that a resentencing on all counts generates a new judgment. So even if the defendant challenged the prior judgment in a federal habeas petition, a new habeas petition challenging the new judgment does not count as second or 4 successive. *Magwood*, 561 U.S. at 341–42. Four years ago, our Court applied *Magwood*, holding that a renewed habeas petition after resentencing does not count as a second or successive challenge to any of the convictions for which he was resented.

Lesko v. Sec’y, Pa. Dep’t of Corr., 34 F.4th 211, 225 (3d Cir. 2022). Williams claims that this holding qualifies as a “reason that justifies relief,” casting his sentence adjustment as akin to a *Magwood* resentencing. R. 60(b)(6). But our new procedural decision alone does not warrant 60(b) reopening, and there is no need to remand. A. A change in case law alone is not enough of an extraordinary circumstance to warrant reopening. Because Rule 60(b) is an exception to the ordinary finality of judgments, we police its bounds with care.

Its first five categories specify substantive requirements, and its first three are cabined by a one-year time limit. To get around those subject-matter and time limits, litigants are tempted to invoke Rule 60(b)(6)’s catchall. But catchalls are not unlimited—they are cabined by a couple of interpretive canons.

First, there is the *eiusdem generis* canon: After the list of specifics, the catchall implicitly requires circumstances similar to those listed. Antonin Scalia & Bryan A. Garner, *Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts* 199 (2012).

Second, there is the presumption against superfluity. *Id.* at 174. Reading 60(b)(6) broadly would swallow up (b)(1) through (5) and gut the one-year time limit where it applies (in subparts (1)–(3)). Rather than redundant, “[t]hese provisions are mutually exclusive.” *Pioneer Inv. Servs. v. Brunswick Assocs.*, 507 U.S. 380, 393 (1993).

In other words, (b)(6) applies only if (b)(1) through (5) would not. *BLOM Bank SAL v. Honickman*, 605 U.S. 204, 211 (2025). Likewise, the (b)(6) catchall cannot be used to bring claims that belong under other parts of the federal rules. One cannot “repackage tardy Rule 59(e) motions [to alter or amend a judgment] based on legal errors.” *Kemp v. United States*, 596 U.S. 528, 538 (2022).

Nor can one use (b)(6) to cover a motion that “is in substance a successive habeas petition.” *Gonzalez v. Crosby*, 545 U.S. 524, 531 (2005). The upshot is that “Rule 60(b)(6) is available only in narrow circumstances”; its standard is “stringent” and “very strict.” *BLOM Bank SAL*, 605 U.S. at 211, 213, 214.

To prevail, the movant must show “extraordinary circumstances where, without such relief, an extreme and unexpected hardship would occur.” *Sawka v. Healtheast, Inc.*, 989 F.2d 138, 140 (3d Cir. 1993). Rule 60(b)(6) is “equitable and case-dependent.” *Cox*, 757 F.3d at 115.

To apply it, “a district court must consider the full measure of any properly presented facts and circumstances attendant to the movant’s request.” *Id.* at 122. Relevant factors may include the type and effect of any change in law, the merits of the underlying claim for relief, the age of the conviction, the movant’s diligence, the movant’s actual innocence, and the existence of a death sentence.

Id. at 124–26; *Satterfield v. Dist. Att’y Phila.*, 872 F.3d 152, 164 (3d Cir. 2017) (innocence). We have acknowledged that a change in law may be one such factor. *Cox*, 757 F.3d at 124; *Satterfield*, 872 F.3d at 161. Even though a change in law is relevant, the Supreme Court has left open whether such a change, unaccompanied by other equitable factors, can justify 60(b)(6) relief on its own.

See 6 *Polites v. United States*, 364 U.S. 426, 433 (1960); see also *Kemp*, 596 U.S. at 540 (Sotomayor, J., concurring). Yet we have never held that a change in law, without other supporting equitable factors, sufficed. See *Bracey v. Superintendent Rockview SCI*, 986 F.3d 274, 296–97 (3d Cir. 2021) (remanding in part because habeas court had denied movant’s request to hold hearing and develop record and had refused to consider underlying merits at all); *Cox*, 757 F.3d at 126 (remanding in part to consider death sentence and merits); *Satterfield*, 872 F.3d at 162 (remanding in part to consider meritorious claim).

Indeed, we have stressed “that intervening changes in the law rarely justify relief from final judgments under 60(b)(6).” *Cox*, 757 F.3d at 121 (emphasis in original). That is on top of the reality that extraordinary “circumstances will rarely occur in the habeas context.” *Gonzalez*, 545 U.S. at 535. New procedural rules rarely apply retroactively in criminal (or habeas) cases.

They do so only in narrow circumstances. Sometimes, a new rule creates a right to engage in “private individual conduct,” placing that conduct beyond the reach of criminal law. *Teague v. Lane*, 489 U.S. 288, 307 (1989) (plurality opinion); see also *Edwards v. Vannoy*, 593 U.S. 255, 272 (2021); 28 U.S.C. § 2244(b)(2)(A) (new constitutional rules made retroactive by the Supreme Court).

When that happens, the retroactivity bar falls away. And the ordinary rule for civil cases is that new decisions apply only to pending cases, not closed ones. See *Reynoldsville Casket Co. v. Hyde*, 514 U.S. 749, 758–59 (1995). Though Rule 60(b)(6) opens a wee crack in that rule against retroactivity, it does not license an end-run around it. Similarly, the First Step Act’s compassionate-release provision requires 7 “extraordinary and compelling reasons” for a reduced sentence.

18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i). There, as here, “extraordinary” is “not so flexible as to encompass any consideration.” *Rutherford v. United States*, 608 U.S. ___, 146 S. Ct. 1320, 1332 (2026). For instance, a nonretroactive change in sentencing law does not warrant compassionate release. *Id.*

at 1331. So too, an actual-innocence argument is not an extraordinary and compelling reason to reduce a sentence, but is reserved for habeas corpus.

Fernandez v. United States, 608 U.S. ___, 146 S. Ct. 1292, 1304 (2026); see *Gonzalez*, 545 U.S. at 531 (holding that it is improper to use a Rule 60(b)(6) motion to request relief that is “in substance” or “at least similar enough” to a habeas petition).

We have previously held, over a dissent, that a new decision can count as one factor supporting a petitioner’s showing of “extraordinary circumstances” even if it falls outside the narrow retroactivity exception. *Bracey*, 986 F.3d at 295 & n.18. But it cannot suffice as the dispositive factor, amounting to extraordinary circumstances all on its own, unless it falls within a retroactivity exception.

Rather, a Rule 60(b)(6) movant must show that the new precedent is “accompanied by appropriate equitable circumstances” that collectively rise to that demanding standard. *Satterfield*, 872 F.3d at 161. B. Unless the movant proffers supporting facts, no remand is required. Instead of weighing the equitable Cox factors, the District Court jumped straight to the meat of Williams’s Lesko argument against finding his petition was barred as second or successive.

And the magistrate judge merely gestured at them. 8 Neither addressed whether there were “extraordinary circumstances” or “extreme and unexpected hardship.” *Sawka*, 989 F.2d at 140. Often, if a district court fails to weigh the Cox factors, we will remand to let it exercise its equitable discretion in the first instance. *Bracey*, 986 F.3d at 296; *Cox*, 757 F.3d at 124.

Yet “we may affirm the judgment on any grounds supported by the record, including those not reached by the District Court.” *Downey v. Pa. Dep’t of Corr.*, 968 F.3d 299, 309 (3d Cir. 2020). We will do so “if we can determine from the record on appeal that a petitioner cannot show extraordinary circumstances as a matter of law.” *Bracey*, 986 F.3d at 296. Williams, “of course, bears the burden of establishing entitlement to such equitable relief” by “properly present[ing] facts and circumstances attendant to [his] request.” *Cox*, 757 F.3d at 122.

He has not done so. His motion never mentions any hardship, let alone extreme or unexpected ones. Nor did his habeas petition or brief before this Court. Nor does Williams cite any extraordinary circumstances favoring relief. He does not press “a new constitutional rule or right for criminal defendants” like those that trigger retroactivity. *Id.* at 124; see also *Bracey*, 986 F.3d at 296 (emphasizing “the constitutional nature of that change in law”).

He merely claims a right to petition for a writ of habeas corpus under § 2244(b), relying on the Supreme Court’s interpretation in *Magwood* and our holding in *Lesko*. But, as in *Gonzalez*, it is “hardly extraordinary” that a court “arrived at a different [statutory] interpretation.” 545 U.S. at 536. Plus, Williams offered scant argument that he is likely to succeed on the merits of his habeas claims or the balance of 9 equitable factors.

See Cox, 757 F.3d at 124. The claims he wants to revive do not challenge his good-time credits. Rather, five of the six claims in his habeas petition recycle challenges to his underlying conviction that were already considered and denied on the merits.

The sixth claim, the only one that even touches innocence, goes not to his underlying conviction but to a prior 1991 conviction that was used to enhance his 2013 sentence. But convicts “generally may not challenge [an] enhanced sentence through a petition under § 2254 on the ground that the prior conviction was unconstitutionally obtained.” Lackawanna Cnty.

Dist. Att’y v. Coss, 532 U.S. 394, 404 (2001). In any event, Williams did not address the merits of any of his claims in his 60(b) motion, unlike in Bracey. Finally, he never explained his lack of diligence or showed a death sentence. See Cox, 757 F.3d at 125–26.

To be sure, Williams addressed some of the Cox factors on appeal. But he did not raise them in his motion. And it is the motion that matters, for “pro se litigants still must allege sufficient facts ... to support a claim.” *Mala v. Crown Bay Marina, Inc.*, 704 F.3d 239, 245 (3d Cir. 2013) (discussing Rule 12(b)(6)). Without any “properly presented facts and circumstances,” the District Court has nothing to “liberally construe.” Cox, 757 F.3d at 122 (first quotation); *Higgs v. Att’y Gen. of the U.S.*, 655 F.3d 333, 339 (3d Cir.

2011), as amended (Sept. 19, 2011) (second quotation). Thus, this is the rare case where remand would be futile. See *Bracey*, 986 F.3d at 296–97 & n.19. Williams filed his motion under Rule 60(b)(1). And that is exactly what it was—a claim of “mistake” due to a new procedural application of an old Supreme Court case, but an untimely 10 one. Though the District Court acted out of an admirable solicitude for pro se litigants, construing his pro se habeas petition liberally, courts should not recharacterize such petitions as falling under 60(b)(6).

Williams’s petition alleged no exceptional circumstances or extraordinary hardship. His only argument is that the District Court got its Magwood analysis wrong, and that Lesko confirmed its wrongness. It is simply a procedural hook to seek reopening.

Under 60(b)(6), that is insufficient as a matter of law. ***** Williams has had many bites at the apple. Because he did not properly present any facts showing extraordinary circumstances or extreme and unusual hardship, there is no need to remand.

The District Court properly denied his Rule 60(b) motion to reopen the denial of his habeas petition; we will AFFIRM. Counsel for Appellant Samuel G. Saylor [Argued] OFFICE OF FEDERAL PUBLIC DEFENDER Counsel for Appellee Rusheen R. Petti [Argued] ALLEGHENY COUNTY OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY 11