

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
OKLAHOMA

United States v. Paden

617 F.3d 833 · No. CR-22-35-RAW; CV-26-101-RAW · Decided June 3, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma dismissed Donald Lee Paden’s motion under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 as untimely. The court denied equitable tolling and appointment of counsel, granted the Government’s motion to dismiss, and declined to issue a certificate of appealability.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Ronald A. White
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma
DECIDED	June 3, 2026
DOCKET	CR-22-35-RAW; CV-26-101-RAW
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Federal prisoner proceeding pro se moved under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 to vacate, set aside, or correct his sentence. The Government moved to dismiss the motion as untimely. The court also considered Paden's motions for appointment of counsel and equitable tolling.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the one-year statute of limitations in 28 U.S.C. § 2255(f), evaluated whether equitable tolling was warranted, applied the interests-of-justice standard to appointment of counsel under 18 U.S.C. § 3006A, and applied the two-part certificate-of-appealability standard for procedural dismissals under Slack v. McDaniel.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown
PARTIES	Donald Lee Paden v. United States of America

TOPICS

- federal habeas corpus
- post-conviction relief
- criminal procedure
- right to counsel

PRACTICE AREAS

federal habeas corpus

post-conviction relief

criminal procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Paden's § 2255 motion was timely under 28 U.S.C. § 2255(f).
2. Whether equitable tolling was warranted because Paden asserted a novel legal theory.
3. Whether Paden was entitled to appointment of counsel under 18 U.S.C. § 3006A.
4. Whether a certificate of appealability should issue after dismissal of the § 2255 motion on procedural grounds.

HOLDINGS

1. A § 2255 motion filed nearly fifteen months after expiration of the one-year period running from the finality of the conviction is untimely when none of the alternative triggering dates in § 2255(f)(2)-(4) applies.
2. A petitioner's assertion of a novel constitutional theory, without a new constitutional rule recognized by the Supreme Court and made retroactively applicable, does not establish cause sufficient to overcome the time bar.
3. Appointment of counsel was not warranted because the interests of justice did not require it, and there is no general right to counsel in collateral proceedings.
4. No certificate of appealability should issue because reasonable jurists could not debate the correctness of the procedural dismissal.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“There is no right to counsel in collateral proceedings.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Paden pleaded guilty on November 15, 2022, to possession of certain material involving the sexual exploitation of a minor in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2252(a)(4)(B) and (b)(2). He was sentenced to 120 months' imprisonment on December 19, 2023, and judgment was entered in January 2024. He did not appeal and filed his § 2255 motion on April 6, 2026, asserting constitutional challenges to federal child-pornography statutes and their sentencing schemes.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Paden pleaded guilty to possessing material involving the sexual exploitation of a minor, was sentenced to 120 months' imprisonment, and did not appeal. Judgment was entered on January 2, 2024, and an amended judgment was entered on January 4, 2024. He filed his § 2255 motion on April 6, 2026. The district court dismissed the motion as time-barred, denied equitable tolling and appointment of counsel, granted the Government's motion to dismiss, and declined to issue a certificate of appealability.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- United States v. Prows, 448 F.3d 1223, 1227-28 (10th Cir. 2006)
- United States v. Prows, 448 F.3d 1223, 1229 (10th Cir. 2006)
- Cvijetinovic v. Eberlin, 617 F.3d 833, 837 (6th Cir. 2010)
- Carosiello v. Eppinger, 2023 WL 9955818 (N.D. Ohio Dec. 27, 2023)
- Reed, 468 U.S. at 17-20
- Benton v. Brewer, 942 F.3d 305 (6th Cir. 2019)
- Lafler v. Cooper, 566 U.S. 156 (2012)
- Blakely v. Washington, 542 U.S. 296 (2004)
- Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000)

OPINION

Paden

PER CURIAM.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)

) Plaintiff/Respondent,)) Criminal Case No. CR-22-35-RAW v.)) Civil Case No. CV-26-101-
RAW

DONALD LEE PADEN,)

) Defendant/Petitioner.)

ORDER

Now before the court is the motion under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 to vacate, set aside, or correct sentence (“§ 2255 motion”) filed by pro se Defendant Donald Lee Paden. [CR Doc. 81; CV Doc. 1]. Also before the court are a brief in support of the § 2255 motion, a motion for appointment of counsel, and a motion for equitable tolling to overcome § 2255 time bar. [CR Docs. 83, 84, and 85]. The Government filed a motion to dismiss Defendant’s § 2255 motion. [CR Doc. 87]. The Government “requests this [c]ourt enter an order dismissing the § 2255 motion as untimely, denying [Defendant’s] motion for appointment of counsel and overruling his motion for equitable tolling.” *Id.* at 5. This matter is ripe for ruling. On November 15, 2022, Defendant pleaded guilty to Possession of Certain Material Involving the Sexual Exploitation of a Minor in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2252(a)(4)(B) & (b)(2) (Count One of the Superseding Indictment). [CR Doc. 52]. On December 19, 2023, Defendant was sentenced to 120 months of imprisonment. [CR Doc. 70]. Judgment was entered on January 2, 2024. [CR Doc. 75]. An amended judgment was entered on

January 4, 2024. [CR Doc. 77]. Defendant did not appeal. Defendant's § 2255 motion was filed on April 6, 2026. Defendant does not dispute that the § 2255 motion is untimely, but he argues that "[a] novel legal theory can constitute cause to excuse a procedural default under 'equitable tolling' when the claim 'is so novel that its legal basis was not reasonably available to counsel.'" [CR Doc. 85 at 1]. In the § 2255 motion, Defendant asserts three grounds for relief. First, he claims "[a]ll federal statutes criminalizing the production, distribution, viewing, and possession of child pornography are unconstitutional because they have demonstrably and consistently failed to achieve their explicitly stated and singular congressional goal – the eradication of child pornography from the market." [CR Doc. 81 at 13]. Second, he argues that "[t]he sentencing scheme in all federal child pornography statutes are unconstitutional where they are based solely on 'general deterrence' and the primary element of general deterrence – that people are rational – cannot be met because people engaged in this type of behavior are sexually aroused, and sexual arousal has been shown to substantially effect [sic] rational thinking and decision-making." Id. at 15. Lastly, Defendant alleges that "[t]he sentencing scheme in all federal child pornography statutes are unconstitutional where they have failed to achieve the singular goal of Congress – to eradicate the material from the market, despite 47 years of numerous congressional amendments to impose more severe penalties." Id. at 17. Section 2255 motions are subject to a one-year statute of limitations. See 28 U.S.C. § 2255(f). The limitation period shall run from the latest of--

(1) the date on which the judgment of conviction becomes final;

(2) the date on which the impediment to making a motion created by governmental action in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States is removed, if the movant was prevented from making a motion by such governmental action;

(3) the date on which the right asserted was initially recognized by the Supreme Court, if that right has been newly recognized by the Supreme Court and made retroactively applicable to cases on collateral review; or

(4) the date on which the facts supporting the claim or claims presented could have been discovered through the exercise of due diligence. 28 U.S.C. § 2255(f). A federal prisoner typically has one year from the date on which his conviction becomes final to file a motion for habeas corpus relief. See 28 U.S.C. § 2255(f)(1). The Government contends that Defendant's judgment of conviction became final on or about January 18, 2024, which was 14 days after Defendant was sentenced.¹ [CR Doc. 87 at 3]. Therefore, according to the Government, Defendant needed to file his § 2255 motion on or before January 18, 2025, for it to be timely under § 2255(f)

(1). Id. As noted above, Defendant filed his § 2255 motion on April 6, 2026, almost 15 months beyond the one-year filing deadline. In addition, the Government asserts that § 2255(f)(2), § 2255(f)(3), and § 2255(f)(4) are inapplicable. Id. The Government notes that "Defendant has not alleged any impediment to filing his § 2255 motion earlier nor has he argued that his motion rests on newly discovered facts or a new Supreme Court opinion." Id. The Government then responds to Defendant's other arguments: Defendant asks this Court to excuse his delay by invoking equitable

tolling because his motion is based on a “novel” legal theory. He asserts that all child pornography statutes should be declared unconstitutional because they have not been successful in eliminating child pornography. Under his logic, statutes forbidding all manners of murder and mayhem should also be eliminated as people continue, unsurprisingly, to commit criminal acts. He references no citations, new or old, supporting his nonsensical theory. Defendant does rely on *Cvijetinovic v. Eberlin*, 617 F.3d 833, 837 (6th Cir. 2010), as a basis for granting equitable tolling based on “novel” legal theories. The decision has never been mentioned in the Tenth Circuit. It was later distinguished in *Carosiello v. Eppinger*, 2023 WL 9955818, (N.D. Ohio, Dec. 27, 2023): The situation in this case is distinct. The Reed court found “cause” based on new retroactively-applied Supreme Court precedent that disproved a practice the Supreme Court had arguably sanctioned in prior cases, which was “sufficiently novel” at the time of the conviction “to excuse [the petitioner’s] attorney’s failure to raise the ... issue at that time.” 468 U.S. at 17-20. Sixth Circuit courts applying Reed have also addressed allegedly “novel” claims based on new Supreme Court precedent. See, e.g., *Benton v. Brewer*, 942 F.3d 305 (6th Cir. 2019) (assessing “cause” based on application of *Lafler v. Cooper*, 566 U.S. 156 (2012)); *Cvijetinovic v. Eberlin*, 617 F.3d 833 (6th Cir. 2010) (assessing “cause” based on application of *Blakely v. Washington*, 542 U.S. 296 (2004)). Here, there is no recent Supreme Court precedent articulating the new constitutional standards Mr. Carosiello seeks to apply in Grounds Three and Four, let alone precedent applying those standards retroactively. Instead, Mr. Carosiello asserts that his 1 If the defendant does not file an appeal, the criminal conviction becomes final upon the expiration of the time in which to take a direct criminal appeal. *United States v. Prows*, 448 F.3d 1223, 1227-28 (10th Cir. 2006). arguments are wholly novel, having not yet been ruled upon by any court (ECF Doc. 17-1, pp. 160-70, 210-13), and seeks a finding that his novel arguments should be adopted and retroactively applied (*id.* at pp. 176-82, 215). The Reed standard does not support a finding of “cause” where the Supreme Court has not yet articulated “a new constitutional rule, representing a clear break from the past,” 468 U.S. at 17 (internal citation and quotation marks omitted), and Mr. Carosiello has not identified authority to support such a significant extension of the cause and prejudice exception. Indeed, if procedural default were excused every time a petitioner asserted a “novel” constitutional argument—regardless of whether that new constitutional interpretation was adopted and made retroactive by the Supreme Court—the exception to procedural default could swallow the rule, undermining the statutory requirements that federal habeas petitioners must fairly present their claims to the state courts and exhaust all available remedies. See 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b), (c). (Emphasis added). Here, as in *Carosiello*, Defendant “is not seeking relief based on a new constitutional rule established by the Supreme Court, but requesting that this Court announce a new substantive constitutional rule in the first instance.” *Id.* at 39. Such claims do not meet his burden to show cause sufficient to overcome the procedural bar. His motion is filed out of time and should be dismissed. [CR Doc. 87 at 4-5]. The Government’s arguments are persuasive. Defendant’s § 2255 motion should be dismissed as time-barred. A district court may appoint

counsel under 18 U.S.C. § 3006A, for any financially eligible person who is seeking relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2255, whenever the court determines that the interests of justice so require. The court is not persuaded that the interests of justice require appointment of counsel. The Tenth Circuit has explained that “[t]here is no right to counsel in collateral proceedings.” *United States v. Prows*, 448 F.3d 1223, 1229 (10th Cir. 2006). Defendant’s request for appointment of counsel is denied. A certificate of appealability may issue only if Defendant has made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right. 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2). When the district court dismisses a § 2255 motion on procedural grounds, a defendant must satisfy a two-part standard to obtain a certificate of appealability. Defendant must show “jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the [§ 2255 motion] states a valid claim of the denial of a constitutional right and that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling.” *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000). In the case at hand, it is clear that Defendant’s § 2255 motion is untimely, meaning Defendant cannot overcome the second part of the standard. Since the second part has not been established, there is no need to address the first part of the standard. This court hereby declines to issue a certificate of appealability. Defendant’s motion for appointment of counsel [CR Doc. 84] and motion for equitable tolling to overcome § 2255 time bar [CR Doc. 85] are DENIED. The Government’s motion to dismiss Defendant’s § 2255 motion [CR Doc. 87] is GRANTED. Defendant’s motion under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 to vacate, set aside, or correct sentence [CR Doc. 81; CV Doc. 1] is hereby DISMISSED as time-barred.² Pursuant to Rule 11(a) of the Rules Governing Section 2255 Proceedings, this court hereby declines to issue a certificate of appealability. It is so ordered this 3rd day of June, 2026.

THE HONORABLE RONALD A. WHITE
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA

2 The motion, files and records of this case conclusively show that Defendant is entitled to no relief. Thus, no evidentiary hearing was held.