

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Dante Perkins v. Joshua Prudhel

No. 2:25-CV-0947-DC-DMC-P · No. No. 2:25-CV-0947-DC-DMC-P · Decided December 17, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California recommends granting Respondent’s unopposed motion to dismiss a state prisoner’s 28 U.S.C. § 2254 habeas petition. The court concludes that the petitioner’s challenge to the state court’s refusal to strike a firearm sentence enhancement presents an issue of state-law interpretation that is not cognizable on federal habeas review. The findings and recommendations were issued by Magistrate Judge Dennis M. Cota, with objections due within 14 days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Dennis M. Cota
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	December 17, 2025
DOCKET	No. 2:25-CV-0947-DC-DMC-P
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner, a state prisoner proceeding pro se, filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Respondent moved unopposed to dismiss, and the magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations that the motion be granted and the petition dismissed.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A federal habeas court may grant relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 only for a violation of federal law binding on the state courts; alleged errors in interpreting or applying state law generally are not cognizable. A federal court is bound by a state court's interpretation and application of its own law.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Dante Perkins, Petitioner v. Joshua Prudhel, Respondent

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus

post-conviction relief

due process

motions to dismiss

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Federal habeas corpus

Post-conviction relief

Constitutional law

Criminal sentencing

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Perkins's challenge to the California court's refusal to strike a firearm sentence enhancement presented a cognizable federal habeas claim.
2. Whether characterizing the state sentencing-law claim as a due process violation transformed it into a federal constitutional claim cognizable under 28 U.S.C. § 2254.

HOLDINGS

1. A federal habeas petition under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 does not provide relief for an alleged error in a state court's interpretation or application of state law.
2. A state-law sentencing claim is not rendered cognizable under federal habeas review merely because the petitioner labels the alleged error a due process violation, particularly where the alleged error did not infect the trial or resulting conviction.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"It is not available for alleged error in the interpretation or application of state law." (at 2)

"A federal habeas court is bound by the state courts' interpretation and application of state law." (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

A California resentencing court removed two sentence enhancements but declined to strike a third firearm enhancement imposed in the same case. Perkins also alleged that the sentencing court should have referred him for a probation report. The California Court of Appeal rejected his claim, explaining that the state law he cited did not apply to the third firearm enhancement or the prior strike.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Perkins challenged the refusal of a California resentencing court to strike a third firearm sentence enhancement and alleged violations of due process and federal law. The California Court of Appeal for the Third Appellate District denied the same claim, concluding that the cited state law did not apply to the third firearm enhancement or prior strike. Respondent then moved to dismiss the federal habeas petition, and the magistrate judge recommended dismissal.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- United States v. Tucker, 404 U.S. 443, 448 (1972)
- Mullaney v. Wilbur, 421 U.S. 684, 689 (1975)
- Bradshaw v. Richey, 546 U.S. 74, 76 (2005)
- Franzen v. Brinkman, 877 F.2d 26, 26 (9th Cir. 1989)
- United States v. Stiger, 2019 WL 2422486, at *3 (N.D. Okla. June 10, 2019)
- Hill v. Warden, 2014 WL 1093041, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 18, 2014)
- Cooper v. Supreme Court of California, 2014 WL 198708, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 16, 2014)
- Johnson v. Spearman, 2013 WL 3053043, at *2 (C.D. Cal. June 10, 2013)
- Langford v. Day, 110 F.3d 1380, 1389 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Middleton v. Cupp, 768 F.2d 1083, 1085 (9th Cir. 1985)
- Gutierrez v. Griggs, 695 F.2d 1195, 1197 (9th Cir. 1983)
- Lincoln v. Sunn, 807 F.2d 805, 814 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Givens v. Housewright, 786 F.2d 1378, 1381 (9th Cir. 1986)
- Milton v. Wainwright, 407 U.S. 371, 377 (1972)
- Hines v. Enomoto, 658 F.2d 667, 673 (9th Cir. 1981)
- Quigg v. Crist, 616 F.2d 1107 (9th Cir. 1980)
- Lisenba v. California, 314 U.S. 219, 236 (1941)
- Hill v. United States, 368 U.S. 424, 428 (1962)
- Crisafi v. Oliver, 396 F.2d 293, 294-95 (9th Cir. 1968)
- Chavez v. Dickson, 280 F.2d 727, 736 (9th Cir. 1960)
- Estelle v. McGuire, 502 U.S. 62, 67-68 (1991)
- Martinez v. Ylst, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 9 FOR THE EASTERN
DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 10 11 DANTE PERKINS, No. 2:25-CV-0947-DC-DMC-P 12
Petitioner, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 13 v. 14 JOSHUA PRUDHEL, 15
Respondent. 16 17 Petitioner, a state prisoner proceeding pro se, brings this petition for a writ of
18 habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Pending before the Court is Respondent’s unopposed 19
motion to dismiss, ECF No. 11.

20 This action proceeds on the original petition, ECF No. 1. Petitioner asserts that his 21
constitutional due process rights were violated when “two (2) enhancements were removed by 22
the resentencing state court judge who declined to also remove a third that was imposed earlier 23
under the exact same case and circumstances.” ECF No. 1, pg. 6. Petitioner argues his claim 24
does not allege the misapplication of state law, but rather, that Petitioner’s due process rights 25

were violated by the state court's decision to not strike the third enhancement, citing *United States v. Tucker*, 404 U.S. 443, 448 (1972) and *Mullaney v. Wilbur*, 421 U.S. 684, 689 (1975).

27 See *id.* Petitioner contends that the "state judge [was] not aware that the firearm count could be
28 dismissed..." and therefore, Petitioner contends he "was resentenced under an unreasonable 1
application of decision(s) of the United States Supreme Court." *Id.* at 6-7. Petitioner additionally 2
asserts that "the sentencing court had also a statutory entitlement to refer Petitioner Perkins for a 3
probation report whether a public safety risk did indeed exist[] or not at present." *Id.* at 7.

4 In Respondent's motion to dismiss, which Petitioner does not oppose, Respondent 5 argues that
Petitioner's claim is not cognizable because he "challenges the state court's 6 application of state
sentencing law." Respondent contends that: 7 Here, the state court determined that the third
firearm sentence enhancement should not be stricken under state law. This was an ordinary 8
application of the state court's interpretation of state law.

Because a federal habeas court is bound by the state court's interpretation and application of its
own 9 law, Petitioner's claim must fail. See *Bradshaw v. Richey*, 546 U.S. 74, 76 (2005) (holding
that a state court's interpretation of state law binds a federal court sitting 10 in habeas corpus). And
to the extent Petitioner is alleging errors in the state post- conviction review process, his claim is
not addressable through habeas corpus 11 proceedings.

Franzen v. Brinkman, 877 F.2d 26, 26 (9th Cir. 1989). Petitioner's characterization of his challenge
to the state court's refusal to 12 strike a sentence enhancement as a violation of his federal
constitutional rights is not sufficient to render his claim cognizable on federal habeas review. That
is 13 because the heart of his federal claim is not grounded in the Constitution.

Petitioner merely disagrees with the state court's decision that his sentence is 14 valid under
California law. He wants this Court to disagree with the state court's interpretation of state law. As
such, this claim is not cognizable despite 15 Petitioner's Constitutional invocation. See *United States v. Stiger*, 2019 WL 2422486, at *3 (N.D. Ok. Jun.10, 2019) (rejecting Petitioner's argument
that his 16 sentencing enhancement was excessive or cruel and unusual under the Eighth
Amendment); see also e.g., *Hill v. Warden*, 2014 WL 1093041, at *2 (C.D.

Cal. 17 Mar. 18, 2014) (rejecting as non-cognizable petitioner's equal protection challenge to state
court's denial of his application for resentencing under the 18 Three Strikes Reform Act); *Cooper v. Supreme Court of California*, 2014 WL 198708, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 16, 2014) (rejecting as
non-cognizable petitioner's 19 federal due process challenge to state court's denial of his
application for resentencing under the Three Strikes Reform Act); *Johnson v. Spearman*, 2013 20
WL 3053043, at *2 (C.D.

Cal. June 10, 2013 (same); see also, e.g., *Langford v. Day*, 110 F.3d 1380, 1389 (9th Cir. 1996)
(holding that a petitioner may not 21 "transform a state-law issue into a federal one merely by

asserting a violation of due process,” and that “alleged errors in the application of state law are not cognizable in federal habeas corpus” proceedings). 23 Id. at 3.

24 The Court agrees. A writ of habeas corpus is available under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 only on the basis of a transgression of federal law binding on the state courts. See *Middleton v. Cupp*, 768 F.2d 1083, 1085 (9th Cir. 1985); *Gutierrez v. Griggs*, 695 F.2d 1195, 1197 (9th Cir. 27 1983). It is not available for alleged error in the interpretation or application of state law.

28 *Middleton*, 768 F.2d at 1085; see also *Lincoln v. Sunn*, 807 F.2d 805, 814 (9th Cir. 1987); *Givens 1 v. Housewright*, 786 F.2d 1378, 1381 (9th Cir. 1986). Habeas corpus cannot be utilized to try 2 state issues de novo. See *Milton v. Wainwright*, 407 U.S. 371, 377 (1972). 3 However, a “claim of error based upon a right not specifically guaranteed by the 4 Constitution may nonetheless form a ground for federal habeas corpus relief where its impact so 5 infects the entire trial that the resulting conviction violates the defendant’s right to due process.” 6 *Hines v. Enomoto*, 658 F.2d 667, 673 (9th Cir.

1981) (citing *Quigg v. Crist*, 616 F.2d 1107 (9th 7 Cir. 1980)); see also *Lisenba v. California*, 314 U.S. 219, 236 (1941). In order to raise such a 8 claim in a federal habeas corpus petition, the “error alleged must have resulted in a complete 9 miscarriage of justice.” *Hill v. United States*, 368 U.S. 424, 428 (1962); *Crisafi v. Oliver*, 396 10 F.2d 293, 294-95 (9th Cir.

1968); *Chavez v. Dickson*, 280 F.2d 727, 736 (9th Cir. 1960). 11 Here, Petitioner’s claim arises from an alleged error in resentencing, arising from a 12 state law. As such it is not cognizable. The California Court of Appeal for the Third Appellate 13 District denied Petitioner’s appeal, which asserted the same claim, explaining that the state law 14 cited did “not apply to either the third firearm enhancement or the prior strike”.

ECF No. 10-7, 15 pg. 18. Thus, Petitioner is seeking federal review of a matter of state law, already decided by the 16 state resentencing court and the Court of Appeal of the State of California. A federal habeas court 17 is bound by the state courts’ interpretation and application of state law. See *Bradshaw v. Richey*, 18 546 U.S. 74, 76, (2005); *Estelle v. McGuire*, 502 U.S. 62, 67-68 (1991).

19 Though Petitioner argues the application of state law violated his due process 20 rights and asserts the claim therefore arises from federal law, Petitioner’s state law claim does not 21 go to trial proceedings. Thus, he cannot argue that the alleged error produced a conviction which 22 violates due process. Petitioner’s claim is not cognizable and the petition should be dismissed.

23 /// 24 /// 25 /// 26 /// 27 /// 28 ///] Based on the foregoing, the undersigned recommends that Respondent’s 2 || unopposed motion to dismiss, ECF No. 11, be granted. 3 These findings and recommendations are submitted to the United States District 4 | Judge assigned to the case,

pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within 14 days 5 || after being served with these findings and recommendations, any party may file written objections 6 || with the Court.

Responses to objections shall be filed within 14 days after service of objections. 7 || Failure to file objections within the specified time may waive the right to appeal. See *Martinez v.* 8 | *Ylst*, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991). 9 10 | Dated: December 17, 2025 Ss..c0_, M DENNIS M. COTA 2 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28