

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
TENNESSEE, EASTERN DIVISION

**Mariah Lynn Whynot, Intellectually Challenged Individual; By and
Through Next Friend Carrie Shurtleff v. Terri Lee St. Hilaire;
Nicolas Stephen Robinson; Robert Charles Thompson Jr.; The Law
Firm of Thompson & Fernald, P.A.; Joseph Michael Murphy; The
Law Firm of Deloach, Hofstra & Cavis, P.A.; and Taylor Hatch**

Whynot v. St. Hilaire · No. 1:25-cv-01190 STA-jay · Decided March 4, 2026

SUMMARY

A magistrate judge recommends dismissal of a pro se habeas corpus action filed by Carrie Shurtleff on behalf of Mariah Lynn Whynot. The recommendation concludes that neither individual is alleged to be in federal, state, or immigration custody and that Shurtleff lacks standing because she is not Whynot's legal representative or guardian.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee, Eastern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jon A. York, United States Magistrate Judge
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee, Eastern Division
DECIDED	March 4, 2026
DOCKET	1:25-cv-01190 STA-jay
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner filed a pro se action styled as a writ of habeas corpus and moved to proceed in forma pauperis. The matter was referred to a magistrate judge, who issued this report and recommendation after screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), which requires dismissal of an in forma pauperis action that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

PARTIES

Mariah Lynn Whynot, by and through next friend Carrie Shurtleff v. Terri Lee St. Hilaire, Nicolas Stephen Robinson, Robert Charles Thompson Jr., The Law Firm of Thompson & Fernald, P.A., Joseph Michael Murphy, The Law Firm of Deloach, Hofstra & Cavanaugh, P.A., Taylor Hatch

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus standing post-conviction relief civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Federal habeas corpus Civil procedure Standing In forma pauperis screening

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the habeas petition stated a claim for relief when neither the petitioner nor the person on whose behalf the petition was filed was alleged to be in custody.
2. Whether Carrie Shurtleff had standing to bring habeas claims on behalf of Mariah Lynn Whynot when Shurtleff admitted she was not Whynot's legal representative or guardian.
3. Whether the action should be dismissed during in forma pauperis screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

HOLDINGS

1. The petition failed to state a claim for habeas relief because neither Petitioner nor Whynot was alleged to be in federal, state, or immigration custody.
2. Shurtleff lacked standing to bring claims on Whynot's behalf because she admitted that she was not Whynot's legal representative or guardian.
3. The action warranted dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), and the remaining motions should be denied as moot.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The object of a writ of habeas corpus is to ascertain whether a prisoner can lawfully be detained in custody.”

“An individual is held ‘in custody’ by the United States when the United States official charged with his detention has ‘the power to produce’ him.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Carrie Shurtleff filed a pro se habeas action on behalf of Mariah Lynn Whynot, identifying Whynot as her biological daughter. The report states that neither Shurtleff nor Whynot was alleged to be a federal prisoner, in federal or state custody, or illegally detained in immigration custody. Shurtleff also admitted that she was not Whynot's legal representative or guardian.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Carrie Shurtleff filed the action on August 7, 2025, on behalf of her alleged biological daughter, Mariah Lynn Whynot. The motion to proceed in forma pauperis was granted on February 27, 2026. The magistrate judge recommended dismissal of the habeas petition because neither Shurtleff nor Whynot was alleged to be in custody and because Shurtleff admitted she was not Whynot's legal representative or guardian.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Council v. Clemmer, 177 F.2d 22, 23 (D.C. Cir. 1949)
- Munaf v. Geren, 553 U.S. 674, 686, 128 S. Ct. 2207, 2217, 171 L. Ed. 2d 1 (2008)
- Wales v. Whitney, 114 U.S. 564, 574, 5 S. Ct. 1050, 29 L. Ed. 277 (1885)

OPINION

Whynot

PER CURIAM.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
EASTERN DIVISION

MARIAH LYNN WHYNOT Intellectually Challenged Individual; By and Through Next Friend CARRIE SHURTLEFF, Petitioner; v. No. 1:25-cv-01190 STA-jay TERRI LEE ST. HILAIRE; NICOLAS STEPHEN ROBINSON; ROBERT CHARLES THOMPSON JR.; THE LAW FIRM OF THOMPSON & FERNALD, P.A.; JOSEPH MICHAEL MURPHY; THE LAW FIRM OF DELOACH, HOFSTRA & CAVONIS, P.A.; and TAYLOR HATCH Respondents.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

On August 7, 2025, Carrie Shurtleff filed this pro se action against the above-named respondents. [D.E. 1] On the same day, Ms. Shurtleff filed a motion to proceed in forma pauperis, which was granted on February 27, 2026. [D.E. 2] This case has been referred to the United States Magistrate Judge for management and for all pretrial matters for determination and/or report and recommendation as appropriate. Admin. Order 2013-05. The Court is required to screen in forma pauperis cases and to dismiss the case at any time if the Court determines that the action or appeal (i) is frivolous or malicious; (ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or (iii) seeks

monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). Petitioner Shurtleff filed this action as a Writ of Habeas Corpus on behalf of her “biological daughter” Mariah Lynn Whynot (D.E. 1, p. 2). The object of a writ of habeas corpus is to ascertain whether a prisoner can lawfully be detained in custody. See *Council v. Clemmer*, 177 F.2d 22, 23 (D.C. Cir. 1949). “An individual is held ‘in custody’ by the United States when the United States official charged with his detention has ‘the power to produce’ him.” *Munaf v. Geren*, 553 U.S. 674, 686, 128 S. Ct. 2207, 2217, 171 L. Ed. 2d 1 (2008) citing *Wales v. Whitney*, 114 U.S. 564, 574, 5 S.Ct. 1050, 29 L.Ed. 277 (1885). Neither Petitioner nor Ms. Whynot are alleged to be a federal prisoner, in federal or state custody, or illegally detained in immigration custody. Thus, there is no possible relief under a Writ of Habeas Corpus, and so Petitioner has failed to state a claim on which relief may be granted. Moreover, Petitioner admits that she is not the legal representative or guardian of Ms. Whynot, and thus lacks standing to bring claims on her behalf. Consequently, Petitioner’s case warrants dismissal under § 1915(e)(2)(B).

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, the Magistrate Judge recommends that this Court dismiss the Writ of Habeas Corpus in its entirety, and that all remaining motions be denied as moot. Respectfully submitted this 4th day of March, 2026. s/Jon A. York

UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

ANY OBJECTIONS OR EXCEPTIONS TO THIS REPORT AND

RECOMMENDATION MUST BE FILED WITHIN FOURTEEN (14) DAYS AFTER

BEING SERVED WITH A COPY OF THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION. 28

U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). FAILURE TO FILE THEM WITHIN FOURTEEN (14) DAYS MAY

CONSTITUTE A WAIVER AND/OR FORFEITURE OF OBJECTIONS,

EXCEPTIONS, AND ANY FURTHER APPEAL.