

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Chavez v. Smith

Chavez · No. 25-cv-04111-TLT · Decided September 29, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California dismissed Enrique Chavez’s 28 U.S.C. § 2254 habeas petition. The court held that his claim concerning restitution under California law was not cognizable in federal habeas, and noted that the claim also appeared untimely and unexhausted; it denied a certificate of appealability and directed entry of judgment for the respondent.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	September 29, 2025
DOCKET	25-cv-04111-TLT
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner, a state prisoner proceeding pro se, filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The district court dismissed the petition and denied a certificate of appealability.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown
PARTIES	Enrique G. Chavez v. Stephee Smith

TOPICS

- federal habeas corpus
- post-conviction relief

PRACTICE AREAS

- federal habeas corpus
- post-conviction relief

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

- Whether a claim based solely on an alleged violation of state law is cognizable in federal habeas corpus proceedings under 28 U.S.C. § 2254.
- Whether a certificate of appealability should issue.

HOLDINGS

1. A claim based only on state law is not cognizable in federal habeas corpus.
2. A certificate of appealability will not issue because reasonable jurists would not find the district court's assessment of the constitutional claims debatable or wrong.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A claim based only in state law is not a cognizable claim in federal habeas.” (at 1)

“This is not a case in which “reasonable jurists would find the district court’s assessment of the constitutional claims debatable or wrong.”” (at 1)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Enrique G. Chavez is a state prisoner serving a sentence of life without parole. He challenged the imposition of restitution solely under California law, arguing that restitution was unlawful in light of his sentence. The opinion also noted that the claim appeared untimely and unexhausted in the California courts.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Chavez filed a federal habeas petition asserting that restitution violated California law because he was sentenced to life without parole. The court granted his motion to proceed in forma pauperis, dismissed the habeas petition, denied a certificate of appealability, directed entry of judgment for respondent, and closed the case.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Swarthout v. Cooke, 562 U.S. 216, 219 (2011)
- Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000)