

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Nathaniel McFadden v. Brenda Mason, et al.

McFadden v. Mason · No. No. 24-5515-KSM · Decided February 19, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania overruled Petitioner Nathaniel McFadden’s objections and approved and adopted the magistrate judge’s Report and Recommendation. The court denied the petition for a writ of habeas corpus and the motion for appointment of counsel, declined to issue a certificate of appealability, and directed the Clerk to close the case.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Karen Spencer Marston
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	February 19, 2026
DOCKET	No. 24-5515-KSM
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner sought federal habeas corpus relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. After a magistrate judge issued a Report and Recommendation, petitioner objected. The district court overruled the objections, adopted and approved the Report and Recommendation, denied the habeas petition and motion for appointment of counsel, declined to issue a certificate of appealability, and closed the case.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C), the district court conducts a de novo determination of portions of a magistrate judge’s report to which objections are made. The court stated that objections merely rehashing arguments previously presented need not be reconsidered.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court order with no published reporter citation.
PARTIES	Nathaniel McFadden v. Brenda Mason, et al.

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus

post-conviction relief

statute of limitations

civil procedure

constitutional law

PRACTICE AREAS

federal habeas corpus

post-conviction relief

civil procedure

constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether petitioner's objections to the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation required further consideration when they merely rehashed arguments previously presented.
2. Whether the habeas petition could proceed to merits arguments concerning ineffective assistance of counsel despite the one-year limitations period applicable to § 2254 petitions.
3. Whether petitioner was entitled to appointment of counsel in the habeas proceeding.
4. Whether a certificate of appealability should issue.

HOLDINGS

1. A district court need not reconsider objections that merely rehash arguments previously raised before and considered by the magistrate judge.
2. Timeliness is a threshold issue that a § 2254 petition must survive before the court reaches merits arguments such as ineffective assistance of counsel.
3. Petitioner had no constitutional right to appointed counsel in the habeas proceeding, and the motion for appointment of counsel was denied.
4. No certificate of appealability should issue because jurists of reason would not debate the procedural or substantive dispositions of petitioner's claims.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"It is inappropriate for a district court to address objections previously raised before a magistrate judge; to do so would defeat any benefit of judicial efficiency gained by the report and recommendation process." (n.2)

"Timeliness is a threshold matter," (n.3)

"There is no constitutional right to counsel in habeas proceedings." (n.3)

"Because jurists of reason would not debate the procedural or substantive dispositions of Petitioner's claims, no certificate of appealability should be granted." (n.4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The source opinion provides no substantive facts concerning the underlying state conviction or habeas claims. Petitioner sought relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 and argued, among other things, that issues concerning ineffective assistance of counsel could be considered despite a limitations bar. He also sought appointment of counsel in the habeas proceeding.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The petition, response, reply, motion for appointment of counsel, Report and Recommendation, and objections were before the district court. The court independently reviewed the record, concluded that the objections rehearsed arguments previously presented to the magistrate judge, adopted the Report and Recommendation, denied relief, and denied appointment of counsel.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Palmer v. Astrue, No. 09cv820, 2010 WL 1254266, at *2 (E.D. Pa. Mar. 31, 2010)
- Sessa v. Klem, No. 07cv2225, 2007 WL 2769596, at *1 (E.D. Pa. Sept. 20, 2007)
- Woods v. Armel, No. 19cv3303, 2021 WL 12265469, at *1 (E.D. Pa. Sept. 15, 2021)
- Pennsylvania v. Finley, 481 U.S. 551, 555 (1987)
- Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000)

OPINION

MCFADDEN

PER CURIAM.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

NATHANIEL MCFADDEN,

CIVIL ACTION

Petitioner, v. NO. 24-5515-KSM BRENDA MASON, et al., Respondents.

ORDER

AND NOW this 19th day of February, 2026, upon consideration of the Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Doc. No. 2), the response to the Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Doc. No. 12), the Reply in Support of the Petition (Doc. No. 14),¹ the Motion for Appointment of Counsel (Doc. No. 13), the Report and Recommendation filed by United States Magistrate Judge Caroline Goldner Cinquanto (Doc. No. 16), and Petitioner's objections to the Report and Recommendation (Doc. No. 18), and after a thorough and independent review of the record, it is ORDERED that:

1. Petitioner's objections (Doc. No. 18) are OVERRULED.^{2, 3}

¹ As Magistrate Judge Cinquanto did (Doc. No. 16 at 4 n.4), this Court construes Petitioner's Objections to Respondent's Response to Habeas Corpus Relief (Doc. No. 14) as a Reply in Support of his Petition. ² While the Court must "make a de novo determination of the portions of the report . . . to which objection is made," 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C), Petitioners' objections simply rehash arguments he raised before Magistrate Judge Cinquanto, so the Court need not consider them in deciding whether to adopt the Report and Recommendation. See Palmer v. Astrue, No. 09cv820, 2010 WL 1254266, at *2 (E.D. Pa. Mar. 31, 2010) ("It is inappropriate for a

district court to address objections previously raised before a magistrate judge; to do so would defeat any benefit of judicial efficiency gained by the report and recommendation process.” (quotation marks omitted)). 3 Petitioner makes two objections to the Report and Recommendation. (Doc. No. 18.) First, he argues that Magistrate Judge Cinquanto “failed to address the issue of void judgment relating to ineffective counsel . . . which was discussed in Petitioner’s reply brief . . . [and] can be used no matter if

2. The Report and Recommendation of Magistrate Judge Cinquanto (Doc. No. 16) is APPROVED and ADOPTED.

3. The Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Doc. No. 2) is DENIED.

4. The Motion for Appointment of Counsel (Doc. No. 13) is DENIED.

5. There is no basis for the issuance of a certificate of appealability.⁴

6. The Clerk of Court is DIRECTED to CLOSE this case.

IT IS SO ORDERED. /s/ Karen Spencer Marston _____ KAREN SPENCER MARSTON, J. Petitioner is time barred.” (Doc. No. 18 at 1.) Notwithstanding that Petitioner agrees this argument was raised before, and considered by, Magistrate Judge Cinquanto, he is substantively incorrect. Section 2254, the habeas statute through which Petitioner seeks relief, has a one-year statute of limitations. 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d). And “[t]imeliness is a threshold matter,” which the Petition must survive prior to any merits argument regarding ineffective assistance of counsel. *Sessa v. Klem*, No. 07cv2225, 2007 WL 2769596, at *1 (E.D. Pa. Sept. 20, 2007). Second, Petitioner again argues for appointment of counsel. But Petitioner is again incorrect, as Magistrate Judge Cinquanto noted, “[t]here is no constitutional right to counsel in habeas proceedings.” *Woods v. Armel*, No. 19cv3303, 2021 WL 12265469, at *1 (E.D. Pa. Sept. 15, 2021) (citing *Pennsylvania v. Finley*, 481 U.S. 551, 555 (1987)). 4 Because jurists of reason would not debate the procedural or substantive dispositions of Petitioner’s claims, no certificate of appealability should be granted. See *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000) (“Where a district court has rejected the constitutional claims on the merits, the showing required to satisfy § 2253(c) is straightforward: The petitioner must demonstrate that reasonable jurists would find the district court’s assessment of the constitutional claims debatable or wrong. . . . When the district court denies a habeas petition on procedural grounds without reaching the prisoner’s underlying constitutional claim, a COA should issue when the prisoner shows, at least, that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the petition 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.”).