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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

WILLIE J. WOODS,

Petitioner,

No. CIV-S-08-2228 LKK CKD P

vs.

D.K. SISTO,

Respondent.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Petitioner is a California prisoner proceeding pro se with a petition for writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Petitioner challenges the fact that he was denied parole in 2005.

An application for a writ of habeas corpus by a person in custody under a judgment of a state court can be granted only for violations of the Constitution or laws of the United States. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(a). Also, federal habeas corpus relief is not available for any claim decided on the merits in state court proceedings unless the state court’s adjudication of the claim:

- (1) resulted in a decision that was contrary to, or involved an unreasonable application of, clearly established federal law, as determined by the Supreme Court of the United States; or

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1 (2) resulted in a decision that was based on an unreasonable  
2 determination of the facts in light of the evidence presented in the  
State court proceeding.

3 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d).<sup>1</sup> It is the habeas petitioner’s burden to show he is not precluded from  
4 obtaining relief by § 2254(d). See Woodford v. Visciotti, 537 U.S. 19, 25 (2002).

5 The “contrary to” and “unreasonable application” clauses of § 2254(d)(1) are  
6 different. As the Supreme Court has explained:

7 A federal habeas court may issue the writ under the “contrary to”  
8 clause if the state court applies a rule different from the governing  
law set forth in our cases, or if it decides a case differently than we  
9 have done on a set of materially indistinguishable facts. The court  
may grant relief under the “unreasonable application” clause if the  
10 state court correctly identifies the governing legal principle from  
our decisions but unreasonably applies it to the facts of the  
particular case. The focus of the latter inquiry is on whether the  
11 state court’s application of clearly established federal law is  
objectively unreasonable, and we stressed in Williams [v. Taylor],  
12 529 U.S. 362 (2000) that an unreasonable application is different  
from an incorrect one.

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14 Bell v. Cone, 535 U.S. 685, 694 (2002).

15 The court will look to the last reasoned state court decision in determining  
16 whether the law applied to a particular claim by the state courts was contrary to the law set forth  
17 in the cases of the United States Supreme Court or whether an unreasonable application of such  
18 law has occurred. Avila v. Galaza, 297 F.3d 911, 918 (9th Cir. 2002).

19 A state court does not apply a rule different from the law set forth in Supreme  
20 Court cases, or unreasonably apply such law, if the state court simply fails to cite or fails to  
21 indicate an awareness of federal law. Early v. Packer, 537 U.S. 3, 8 (2002).

22 “[W]hen a federal claim has been presented to a state court and the state court has  
23 denied relief, it may be presumed that the state court adjudicated the claim on the merits in the  
24 absence of any indication or state-law procedural principles to the contrary.” Harrington v.

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26 <sup>1</sup> Title 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d) establishes a precondition to federal habeas relief, not  
grounds for entitlement to habeas relief. Fry v. Pliler, 551 U.S. 112, 119 (2007).

1 Richter, 131 S. Ct. 770, 784-85 (2011). “The presumption may be overcome when there is  
2 reason to think some other explanation for the state court's decision is more likely.” Id. at 785.

3           Where the state court fails to give any reasoning whatsoever in support of the  
4 denial of a claim arising under Constitutional or federal law, the Ninth Circuit has held that this  
5 court must perform an independent review of the record to ascertain whether the state court  
6 decision was objectively unreasonable. Himes v. Thompson, 336 F.3d 848, 853 (9th Cir. 2003).  
7 As long as “‘fairminded jurists could disagree’ on the correctness of the state court’s decision,”  
8 habeas relief is precluded. Harrington, 131 S. Ct. 786.

9           Petitioner asserts he was denied parole in 2005 in violation of the Due Process  
10 Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment  
11 prohibits state action that deprives a person of life, liberty, or property without due process of  
12 law. A litigant alleging a due process violation must first demonstrate that he was deprived of a  
13 liberty or property interest protected by the Due Process Clause and then show that the  
14 procedures attendant upon the deprivation were not constitutionally sufficient. Kentucky Dep’t  
15 of Corrections v. Thompson, 490 U.S. 454, 459-60 (1989).

16           A protected liberty interest may arise from either the Due Process Clause of the  
17 United States Constitution “by reason of guarantees implicit in the word ‘liberty,’” or from “an  
18 expectation or interest created by state laws or policies.” Wilkinson v. Austin, 545 U.S. 209,  
19 221 (2005) (citations omitted). The United States Constitution does not, of its own force, create  
20 a protected liberty interest in a parole date, even one that has been set. Jago v. Van Curen, 454  
21 U.S. 14, 17-21 (1981); Greenholtz v. Inmates of Neb. Penal, 442 U.S. 1, 7 (1979) (There is “no  
22 constitutional or inherent right of a convicted person to be conditionally released before the  
23 expiration of a valid sentence.”). However, “a state’s statutory scheme, if it uses mandatory  
24 language, ‘creates a presumption that parole release will be granted’ when or unless certain  
25 designated findings are made, and thereby gives rise to a constitutional liberty interest.”  
26 Greenholtz, 442 U.S. at 12.

1 California's parole statutes give rise to a liberty interest in parole protected by the  
2 federal due process clause. Swarthout v. Cooke, 131 S. Ct. 859, 861 (2011) (per curiam). In  
3 California, a prisoner is entitled to release on parole unless there is "some evidence" of his or her  
4 current dangerousness. In re Lawrence, 44 Cal.4th 1181, 1205-06, 1210 (2008); In re  
5 Rosenkrantz, 29 Cal.4th 616, 651-53 (2002). However, in Swarthout the United States Supreme  
6 Court held that "[n]o opinion of [theirs] supports converting California's 'some evidence' rule  
7 into a substantive federal requirement." Swarthout, 131 S. Ct. at 862. In other words, the Court  
8 specifically rejected the notion that there can be a valid claim under the Fourteenth Amendment  
9 for insufficiency of evidence presented at a parole proceeding. Id. at 863. Rather, the protection  
10 afforded by the federal due process clause to California parole decisions consists solely of the  
11 "minimal" procedural requirements set forth in Greenholtz, specifically "an opportunity to be  
12 heard and . . . a statement of the reasons why parole was denied." Id. at 862.

13 Here, the record reflects that petitioner was present at his 2005 parole hearing,  
14 Pet. at 40,<sup>2</sup> he was given an opportunity to be heard throughout his hearing, id. at 40-112, and  
15 was provided with the reasons for the decision to deny parole, id. at 108-112. According to the  
16 United States Supreme Court, the Due Process Clause requires no more. Accordingly,  
17 petitioner's denial of federal due process claim must be rejected.

18 Petitioner also asserts that certain rights arising under state law were violated  
19 when he was denied parole. However, petitioner may not obtain relief on these claims because,  
20 as indicated above, an application for writ of habeas corpus can only be granted if a violation of  
21 federal law has occurred. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(a).

22 Accordingly, IT IS HEREBY RECOMMENDED that petitioner's application for  
23 a writ of habeas corpus be denied.

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26 <sup>2</sup> When referencing petitioner's application for writ of habeas corpus, the page numbers  
identified are those assigned by the court's electronic docketing system.

