

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

RAYMOND C. FAIRFIELD,

Petitioner,

Case No. 1:11-cv-228

v.

Honorable Janet T. Neff

WILLIE SMITH,

Respondent.

_____ /

OPINION

This is a habeas corpus action brought by a state prisoner under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Promptly after the filing of a petition for habeas corpus, the Court must undertake a preliminary review of the petition to determine whether “it plainly appears from the face of the petition and any exhibits annexed to it that the petitioner is not entitled to relief in the district court.” Rule 4, RULES GOVERNING § 2254 CASES; *see* 28 U.S.C. § 2243. If so, the petition must be summarily dismissed. Rule 4; *see Allen v. Perini*, 424 F.2d 134, 141 (6th Cir. 1970) (district court has the duty to “screen out” petitions that lack merit on their face). A dismissal under Rule 4 includes those petitions which raise legally frivolous claims, as well as those containing factual allegations that are palpably incredible or false. *Carson v. Burke*, 178 F.3d 434, 436-37 (6th Cir. 1999). After undertaking the review required by Rule 4, the Court will dismiss the petition without prejudice for failure to exhaust available state-court remedies.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Petitioner presently is incarcerated at the Ionia Maximum Correctional Facility. Following a jury trial, Petitioner was convicted of stalking a minor, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 750.411h(2)(b). On July 29, 2008, the Ionia County Circuit Court sentenced him as a second felony offender, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 769.10, to a prison term of two to seven-and-one-half years.

Petitioner appealed his conviction, raising three grounds: (1) error in the denial of Petitioner's motion for directed verdict; (2) insufficient evidence; and (3) prosecutorial misconduct. In an unpublished opinion issued January 5, 2010, the Michigan Court of Appeals rejected all appellate arguments and affirmed the conviction. Petitioner sought leave to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court. It appears from the petition that he raised the same three grounds he presented to the court of appeals, together with a fourth ground concerning the use of a mini-cassette tape that Petitioner alleges was planted. The supreme court denied leave to appeal on April 27, 2010.

In his habeas application, Petitioner raises only the fourth ground, which he first presented to the Michigan Supreme Court.

II. Motion to Appoint Counsel

Petitioner has requested a court-appointed attorney. Indigent habeas petitioners have no constitutional right to a court-appointed attorney. *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483 (1969); *Barker v. Ohio*, 330 F.2d 594 (6th Cir. 1964); *see Lavado v. Keohane*, 992 F.2d 601, 604-05 (6th Cir. 1993). The Court is required by rule to appoint an attorney only if an evidentiary hearing is necessary or if the interest of justice so requires. Rule 8(c), RULES GOVERNING SECTION 2254 CASES. The Court has considered the complexity of the issues and the procedural posture of the case. Upon review,

the assistance of counsel does not appear necessary to the proper presentation of Petitioner's position. Petitioner's motion for appointment of counsel (docket #2) therefore is denied.

III. Exhaustion of State-Court Remedies

Before the Court may grant habeas relief to a state prisoner, the prisoner must exhaust remedies available in the state courts. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1); *O'Sullivan v. Boerckel*, 526 U.S. 838, 842 (1999). Exhaustion requires a petitioner to "fairly present" federal claims so that state courts have a "fair opportunity" to apply controlling legal principles to the facts bearing upon a petitioner's constitutional claim. *See O'Sullivan*, 526 U.S. at 844-45; *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. 270, 275-77 (1971), *cited in Duncan v. Henry*, 513 U.S. 364, 365 (1995), and *Anderson v. Harless*, 459 U.S. 4, 6 (1982). To fulfill the exhaustion requirement, a petitioner must have fairly presented his federal claims to all levels of the state appellate system, including the state's highest court. *Duncan*, 513 U.S. at 365-66; *Wagner v. Smith*, 581 F.3d 410, 414 (6th Cir. 2009); *Hafley v. Sowders*, 902 F.2d 480, 483 (6th Cir. 1990). "[S]tate prisoners must give the state courts one full opportunity to resolve any constitutional issues by invoking one complete round of the State's established appellate review process." *O'Sullivan*, 526 U.S. at 845. The district court can and must raise the exhaustion issue *sua sponte* when it clearly appears that habeas claims have not been presented to the state courts. *See Prather v. Rees*, 822 F.2d 1418, 1422 (6th Cir. 1987); *Allen*, 424 F.2d at 138-39.

Petitioner bears the burden of showing exhaustion. *See Rust v. Zent*, 17 F.3d 155, 160 (6th Cir. 1994). Petitioner alleges that he raised his sole ground for habeas relief for the first time in the Michigan Supreme Court. Presentation of an issue for the first time on discretionary review to the state supreme court does not fulfill the requirement of "fair presentation." *Castille v. Peoples*, 489 U.S. 346, 351 (1989). Applying *Castille*, the Sixth Circuit holds that a habeas petitioner does not comply with the exhaustion requirement when he fails to raise a claim in the state

court of appeals, but raises it for the first time on discretionary appeal to the state's highest court. *See Dunbar v. Pitcher*, No. 98-2068, 2000 WL 179026, at *1 (6th Cir. Feb. 9, 2000); *Miller v. Parker*, No. 99-5007, 1999 WL 1282436, at *2 (6th Cir. Dec. 27, 1999); *Troutman v. Turner*, No. 95-3597, 1995 WL 728182, at *2 (6th Cir. Dec. 7, 1995); *Hafley v. Sowders*, 902 F.2d 480, 483 (6th Cir. 1990); *accord Parkhurst v. Shillinger*, 128 F.3d 1366, 1368-70 (10th Cir. 1997); *Ellman v. Davis*, 42 F.3d 144, 148 (2d Cir. 1994); *Cruz v. Warden of Dwight Corr. Ctr.*, 907 F.2d 665, 669 (7th Cir. 1990); *but see Ashbaugh v. Gundy*, 244 F. App'x 715, 717 (6th Cir. 2007) (declining to reach question of whether a claim raised for the first time in an application for leave to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court is exhausted). Unless the state supreme court actually grants leave to appeal and reviews the issue, it remains unexhausted in the state courts. Petitioner's application for leave to appeal was denied, and, thus, the issue was not reviewed.

An applicant has not exhausted available state remedies if he has the right under state law to raise, by any available procedure, the question presented. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(c). Petitioner has at least one available procedure by which to raise the issues he has presented in this application. He may file a motion for relief from judgment under MICH. CT. R. 6.500 *et seq.* Under Michigan law, one such motion may be filed after August 1, 1995. MICH. CT. R. 6.502(G)(1). Petitioner has not yet filed his one allotted motion. Therefore, the Court concludes that he has at least one available state remedy.

Petitioner's application is subject to the one-year statute of limitations provided in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1). Under § 2244(d)(1)(A), the one-year limitation period runs from "the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review." Petitioner appealed his conviction to the Michigan Court of Appeals and Michigan Supreme Court. The Michigan Supreme Court denied his application on April 27, 2010.

Petitioner did not petition for certiorari to the United States Supreme Court, though the ninety-day period in which he could have sought review in the United States Supreme Court is counted under § 2244(d)(1)(A). See *Bronaugh v. Ohio*, 235 F.3d 280, 283 (6th Cir. 2000). The ninety-day period expired on Monday, July 26, 2010. Accordingly, absent tolling, Petitioner would have one year, or until July 26, 2011, in which to file his habeas petition.

In *Palmer v. Carlton*, 276 F.3d 777, 781 (6th Cir. 2002), the Sixth Circuit held that when the dismissal of a “mixed”¹ petition could jeopardize the timeliness of a subsequent petition, the district court should dismiss only the unexhausted claims and stay further proceedings on the remaining portion until the petitioner has exhausted his claims in the state court. *Id.*; see also *Rhines v. Weber*, 544 U.S. 269, 277 (2007) (approving stay-and-abeyance procedure); *Griffin v. Rogers*, 308 F.3d 647, 652 n.1 (6th Cir. 2002). The Court indicated that thirty days was a reasonable amount of time for a petitioner to file a motion for post-conviction relief in state court, and another thirty days was a reasonable amount of time for a petitioner to return to federal court after he has exhausted his state-court remedies.²

The instant case does not present a mixed petition because Petitioner’s sole claim is not exhausted. It is unclear whether *Palmer* applies to a “non-mixed” petition. Assuming *Palmer* applies, Petitioner has more than sixty days remaining in the limitations period, and, thus, he is not in danger of running afoul of the statute of limitations so long as he diligently pursues his state court remedies. Therefore, a stay of these proceedings is not warranted.

Conclusion

¹A “mixed petition” is a habeas corpus petition that contains both exhausted and unexhausted claims.

²The running of the statute of limitations is tolled when “a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending.” 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2).

For the foregoing reasons, the Court will dismiss the petition for failure to exhaust available state-court remedies.

Certificate of Appealability

Under 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2), the Court must determine whether a certificate of appealability should be granted. A certificate should issue if Petitioner has demonstrated a “substantial showing of a denial of a constitutional right.” 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2). This Court’s dismissal of Petitioner’s action under Rule 4 of the Rules Governing § 2254 Cases is a determination that the habeas action, on its face, lacks sufficient merit to warrant service. It would be highly unlikely for this Court to grant a certificate, thus indicating to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals that an issue merits review, when the Court already has determined that the action is so lacking in merit that service is not warranted. *See Love v. Butler*, 952 F.2d 10, 15 (1st Cir. 1991) (it is “somewhat anomalous” for the court to summarily dismiss under Rule 4 and grant a certificate); *Hendricks v. Vasquez*, 908 F.2d 490 (9th Cir. 1990) (requiring reversal where court summarily dismissed under Rule 4 but granted certificate); *Dory v. Comm’r of Corr. of the State of New York*, 865 F.2d 44, 46 (2d Cir. 1989) (it was “intrinsically contradictory” to grant a certificate when habeas action does not warrant service under Rule 4); *Williams v. Kullman*, 722 F.2d 1048, 1050 n.1 (2d Cir. 1983) (issuing certificate would be inconsistent with a summary dismissal).

The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals has disapproved issuance of blanket denials of a certificate of appealability. *Murphy v. Ohio*, 263 F.3d 466 (6th Cir. 2001). Rather, the district court must “engage in a reasoned assessment of each claim” to determine whether a certificate is warranted. *Id.* at 467. Each issue must be considered under the standards set forth by the Supreme

Court in *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473 (2000). *Murphy*, 263 F.3d at 467. Consequently, this Court has examined each of Petitioner's claims under the *Slack* standard.

This Court denied Petitioner's application on the procedural ground of lack of exhaustion. Under *Slack*, 529 U.S. at 484, when a habeas petition is denied on procedural grounds, a certificate of appealability may issue only "when the prisoner shows, at least, [1] that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the petition states a valid claim of the denial of a constitutional right and [2] that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling." Both showings must be made to warrant the grant of a certificate. *Id.* The Court finds that reasonable jurists could not debate that this Court correctly dismissed the petition on the procedural ground of lack of exhaustion. "Where a plain procedural bar is present and the district court is correct to invoke it to dispose of the case, a reasonable jurist could not conclude either that the district court erred in dismissing the petition or that the petitioner should be allowed to proceed further." *Id.* Therefore, the Court denies Petitioner a certificate of appealability.

A Judgment and Order consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: March 29, 2011

/s/ Janet T. Neff
Janet T. Neff
United States District Judge