

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

MILES ORLANDO LEE,

Petitioner,

Case No. 2:15-cv-12

v.

Honorable R. Allan Edgar

THOMAS MACKIE,

Respondent.

_____ /

OPINION

This is a habeas corpus action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254.¹ 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

¹Petitioner purports to bring this habeas corpus petition pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241. A state prisoner seeking post-conviction relief from a federal court has but one remedy: an application for a writ of habeas corpus. All such applications for writs of habeas corpus are governed by § 2241, which generally authorizes federal courts to grant the writ – to both federal and state prisoners. Most state prisoners’ applications for writs of habeas corpus are subject also to the additional restrictions of § 2254. That is, if a state prisoner is ‘in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court,’ his petition is subject to § 2254. If, however, a prisoner is in prison pursuant to something other than a judgment of a state court, e.g., a pre-trial bond order, then his petition is not subject to § 2254.” *Medberry v. Crosby*, 351 F.3d 1049, 1062 (11th Cir. 2003). *But see McIntosh v. U.S. Parole Comm’n*, 115 F.3d 809, 811 (10th Cir. 1997) (allowing state prisoners to proceed under § 2241 when attacking the execution of their sentences, in contrast to § 2254 (like § 2255), which are used to attack the validity of a conviction and sentence), *cited in Medberry*, 2003 WL 22784246, at * 11 n.8. As the Sixth Circuit observed in *Greene v. Tenn. Dep’t of Corr.*, 265 F.3d 369, 371 (6th Cir. 2001), § 2254 is the correct vehicle for contesting loss of good time credit in prison disciplinary proceedings. *Id.* (citing cases). The procedural requirements applicable under § 2254 also apply to petitions brought pursuant to § 2241. *Id.*

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 concludes that the petition must be dismissed because it fails to raise a meritorious federal claim.

Factual Allegations

Petitioner Miles Orlando Lee is a state prisoner currently confined at the Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility (AMF) pursuant to a October 17, 2014, state court conviction. Petitioner seeks to challenge three January 12, 2015, misconduct convictions, which each resulted in 10 days loss of privileges. Petitioner claims that the misconducts were elevated from class II to class I misconducts in violation of MDOC policy.

Discussion

Petitioner claims that the major misconduct convictions violated his due process rights. A petition for habeas corpus is the proper vehicle for bringing a challenge to the fact or duration of confinement. *See Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 484, 493, 93 S. Ct. 1827, 1833 (1973) (the essence of habeas corpus is an attack by a person in custody upon the legality of that custody and the traditional function of the writ is to secure release from illegal custody).

A prisoner's ability to challenge a prison misconduct conviction depends on whether the convictions implicated any liberty interest. In the seminal case in this area, *Wolff v. McDonnell*, 418 U.S. 539 (1974), the Court prescribed certain minimal procedural safeguards that prison officials must follow before depriving a prisoner of good-time credits on account of alleged misbehavior. The *Wolff* Court did not create a free-floating right to process that attaches to all prison disciplinary proceedings; rather the right to process arises only when the prisoner faces a loss of liberty, in the form of a longer prison sentence caused by forfeiture of good-time credits:

It is true that the Constitution itself does not guarantee good-time credit for satisfactory behavior while in prison. But here the State itself has not only provided a statutory right to good time but also specifies that it is to be forfeited only for serious misbehavior. Nebraska may have the authority to create, or not, a right to a shortened prison sentence through the accumulation of credits for good behavior, and it is true that the Due Process Clause does not require a hearing “in every conceivable case of government impairment of private interest.” But the State having created the right to good time and itself recognizing that its deprivation is a sanction authorized for major misconduct, the prisoner’s interest has real substance and is sufficiently embraced within Fourteenth Amendment “liberty” to entitle him to those minimum procedures appropriate under the circumstances and required by the Due Process Clause to insure that the state-created right is not arbitrarily abrogated.

Wolff, 418 U.S. at 557 (citations omitted).

Petitioner does not allege that his major misconduct convictions resulted in any loss of good-time credits, nor could he. The Sixth Circuit has examined Michigan statutory law, as it relates to the creation and forfeiture of disciplinary credits² for prisoners convicted for crimes occurring after April 1, 1987. In *Thomas v. Eby*, 481 F.3d 434 (6th Cir. 2007), the court determined that loss of disciplinary credits does not necessarily affect the duration of a prisoner’s sentence. Rather, it merely affects parole eligibility, which remains discretionary with the parole board. 481 F.3d at 440. Building on this ruling, in *Nali v. Ekman*, 355 F. App’x 909 (6th Cir. 2009), the court held that a misconduct citation in the Michigan prison system does not affect a prisoner’s constitutionally protected liberty interests, because it does not necessarily affect the length of confinement. 355 F. App’x at 912; *accord*, *Wilson v. Rapelje*, No. 09-13030, 2010 WL 5491196, at * 4 (E.D. Mich. Nov. 24, 2010) (Report & Recommendation) (holding that “Petitioner’s disciplinary hearing and major misconduct sanction does not implicate the Fourteenth Amendment

² For crimes committed after April 1, 1987, Michigan prisoners earn “disciplinary credits” under a statute that abolished the former good-time system. MICH. COMP. LAWS § 800.33(5).

Due Process Clause”), *adopted as judgment of court*, 2011 WL 5491196 (Jan. 4, 2011). Moreover, in *Taylor v. Lantagne*, 418 Fed. Appx. 408, 2011 WL 1284359 (6th Cir. 2011) the Sixth Circuit held that, for all crimes committed after December 15, 2008, prisoners accrue no credits, only “disciplinary time” that is submitted to the parole board to aid its determination. In the absence of a demonstrated liberty interest, Petitioner has no due-process claim based on the loss of disciplinary credits. *See Bell v. Anderson*, 301 F. App’x 459, 461-62 (6th Cir. 2008). Furthermore, because Petitioner’s misconduct tickets do not affect the fact or duration of his confinement, they are not a proper subject for a habeas corpus action. *Wilkinson v. Dotson*, 544 U.S. 74, 79 (2005).

Conclusion

In light of the foregoing, the Court will summarily dismiss Petitioner’s application pursuant to Rule 4 because it fails to raise a meritorious federal claim.

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 has already determined that the action is so lacking in merit that service is not warranted. *See Love v. Butler*, 952 F.2d 10 (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 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. Under *Slack*, 529 U.S. at 484, to warrant a grant of the certificate, “[t]he petitioner must demonstrate that reasonable jurists would find the district court’s assessment of the constitutional claims debatable or wrong.” *Id.* “A petitioner satisfies this standard by demonstrating that . . . jurists could conclude the issues presented are adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further.” *Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 327 (2003). In applying this standard, the Court may not conduct a full merits review, but must limit its examination to a threshold inquiry into the underlying merit of Petitioner’s claims. *Id.*

The Court finds that reasonable jurists could not conclude that this Court’s dismissal of Petitioner’s claims was debatable or wrong. Therefore, the Court will deny Petitioner a certificate of appealability.

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

Dated: 3/10/2015

/s/ R. Allan Edgar
R. ALLAN EDGAR
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE