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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEVADA

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OMAR AYALA,

v.

BRIAN E. WILLIAMS, SR., *et al.*,

Respondents.

Case No. 2:17-cv-02093-RFB-VCF

ORDER

I. Introduction

This action is a petition for writ of habeas corpus by Nevada prisoner Omar Ayala. The respondents have filed a motion to dismiss Ayala’s fourth amended habeas petition on the ground that all Ayala’s claims are barred by the statute of limitations and on the ground that one claim, Ground 18, is procedurally defaulted. The Court will grant the motion to dismiss in part. The Court will dismiss Ground 18 as barred by the procedural default doctrine. The Court will deny the motion to dismiss in all other respects. The Court will set a schedule for the respondents to file an answer.

II. Background

In its order on Ayala’s direct appeal, the Nevada Supreme Court described the factual background of this case as follows:

Appellant Omar Ayala and his codefendants Angel Perez and Francisco Cruz attended an illegal street race and attempted to rob a car belonging to another group of men, then started shooting at them, killing one person. Ayala and his codefendants were apprehended shortly after the incident. Ayala admitted to the police that he brought a handgun to the race, that he and his codefendants planned to rob the owner of another vehicle, that he fired his gun while outside of his vehicle, that he may have been responsible for shooting the victim, and that he fired his gun out of the window of the car as he and his group fled the scene.

1 Order of Affirmance, Exh. 122, p. 1 (ECF No. 16-2, p. 2). After a jury trial in Nevada's
2 Eighth Judicial District Court (Clark County), Ayala was convicted of conspiracy to commit
3 robbery, attempted robbery with the use of a deadly weapon, second-degree murder with
4 the use of a deadly weapon, attempted murder with the use of a deadly weapon, assault
5 with a deadly weapon, and discharging a firearm out of a motor vehicle. See id.; see also
6 Judgment of Conviction, Exh. 105 (ECF No. 15-10).

7 The Nevada Supreme Court affirmed the judgment of conviction on June 20, 2012.
8 See Order of Affirmance, Exh. 122 (ECF No. 16-2).

9 Ayala filed a post-conviction petition for writ of habeas corpus in the state district
10 court on June 6, 2013. See Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Post-Conviction), Exh.
11 126 (ECF No. 16-6). The state district court held an evidentiary hearing (see Transcript
12 of Evidentiary Hearing, Exh. 135 (ECF No. 17-7)), and then denied Ayala's petition on
13 January 27, 2016. See Order Denying Petition, Exh. 136 (ECF No. 17-8). Ayala appealed,
14 and the Nevada Supreme Court affirmed on May 9, 2017. See Order of Affirmance, Exh.
15 150 (ECF No. 18-3). The Nevada Supreme Court's remittitur was issued on June 5, 2017.
16 See Remittitur, Exh. 152 (ECF No. 18-5).

17 Ayala submitted his original pro se federal habeas corpus petition for filing,
18 initiating this action, on July 31, 2017 (ECF No. 1-1). Counsel was appointed for Ayala,
19 and, with counsel, he filed a first amended habeas petition on September 15, 2017 (ECF
20 No. 8), and a second amended habeas petition on January 23, 2018 (ECF No. 23).

21 Respondents filed a motion to dismiss on March 26, 2018 (ECF No. 25), arguing
22 that Ground 7 of Ayala's second amended petition was barred by the statute of limitations
23 and unexhausted in state court. The Court granted that motion on January 15, 2019, and
24 ordered Ground 7 of Ayala's second amended petition dismissed (ECF No. 29).

25 On May 9, 2019, Ayala filed a motion for leave to file a third amended petition (ECF
26 No. 32); his proposed third amended petition was attached to the motion (ECF No. 32-1).
27 The Court granted that motion on August 9, 2019 (ECF No. 36), and Ayala's third
28 amended petition was filed on that date (ECF No. 37).

1 Ayala then filed a motion requesting that this action be stayed while he exhausted
2 in state court the new claim added in his third amended petition, what is now Ground 18
3 (ECF No. 38). The respondents filed a notice indicating that they did not oppose the
4 motion for stay (ECF No. 39), and the Court granted the motion and stayed the case on
5 September 24, 2019 (ECF No. 40).

6 Ayala initiated a second state habeas action on May 9, 2019. See Petition for Writ
7 of Habeas Corpus (Post-Conviction), Exh. 158 (ECF No. 55-1). The state district court
8 ruled the one claim in that petition (Ground 18 in this case) procedurally barred and denied
9 it on that ground. See Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order, Exh. 163 (ECF
10 No. 55-6). The Nevada Supreme Court affirmed on January 15, 2021. See Order of
11 Affirmance, Exh. 156 (ECF No. 47-3). The stay of this case was lifted on April 13, 2021
12 (ECF No. 45).

13 Ayala then filed a fourth amended habeas petition—now his operative petition—
14 on May 13, 2021 (ECF No. 46). Ayala’s fourth amended petition includes the following
15 claims:

16 Ground 1: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated as a result of
17 “[t]he state district court’s failure to dismiss the tainted jury pool.” Fourth
Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 8–13.

18 Ground 2: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because of
19 “[t]he state district court’s denial of Ayala’s Batson challenge to the State’s
striking of two African Americans from the jury pool.” Id. at 13–14.

20 Ground 3: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because of
21 “[t]he state district court’s denial of the motion to sever the trial of the
defendants.” Id. at 15–16.

22 Ground 4: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because of
23 prosecutorial misconduct. Id. at 16–19.

24 Ground 5: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because “the
25 jury was not properly instructed on the elements of second degree murder.”
Id. at 19–24.

26 Ground 6: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated as a result of
27 ineffective assistance of counsel, because his trial counsel failed “to file a
motion to suppress [his] statements to police.” Id. at 24–27.

28 [There is no Ground 7, likely reflecting the dismissal of that claim upon the
respondents’ motion to dismiss Ayala’s second amended petition.]

1 Ground 8: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
2 trial counsel was ineffective for “conceding Ayala’s guilt.” Id. at 27–29.

3 Ground 9: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
4 trial counsel was ineffective “for failing to raise a claim of self defense.” Id.
5 at 29–31.

6 Ground 10: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
7 “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to file a motion to sever his case
8 from that of his co-defendants.” Id. at 31–32.

9 Ground 11: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
10 “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to investigate key defense witness
11 Angela Soloranzo.” Id. at 33–34.

12 Ground 12: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
13 “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to introduce shell casings later
14 found at the crime scene.” Id. at 34–35.

15 Ground 13: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
16 “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to object to testimony concerning
17 uncharged bad acts.” Id. at 35–37.

18 Ground 14: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
19 “[a]ppellate counsel was ineffective for failing to properly brief an issue of
20 prosecutorial misconduct arising from the State’s improper use of the term
21 “gangsta.” Id. at 37–39.

22 Ground 15: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
23 “[a]ppellate counsel was ineffective for failing to raise the claim that Ayala’s
24 sentence was cruel and unusual.” Id. at 39–40.

25 Ground 16: Ayala’s federal constitutional rights were violated because his
26 “[a]ppellate counsel was ineffective for failing to raise the claim that the trial
27 court violated Ayala’s right to due process when it improperly canvassed
28 Ayala about trial counsel’s concession of guilt.” Id. at 40–42.

Ground 17: “The cumulative error of trial and appellate counsel’s
ineffectiveness” violated Ayala’s federal constitutional rights. Id. at 42–43.

Ground 18: “Ayala’s waiver of his fundamental right to secured autonomy
to decide whether to concede charges to the jury was not knowing,
intelligent, or voluntary,” in violation of his federal constitutional rights. Id. at
43–45.

Respondents filed a motion to dismiss on October 11, 2021 (ECF No. 54 (errata
at ECF No. 56)), requesting dismissal of Ayala’s fourth amended petition on the ground
that all the claims in it are barred by the statute of limitations and on the ground that
Ground 18 is procedurally defaulted. The parties have fully briefed that motion (ECF Nos.
57, 60).

1 **III. Discussion**

2 **A. Statute of Limitations**

3 The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), enacted in 1996,
4 established a one-year statute of limitations for federal habeas petitions filed by prisoners
5 challenging state convictions or sentences; the statute provides:

6 (1) A 1-year period of limitation shall apply to an application for a writ
7 of habeas corpus by a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State
8 court. The limitation period shall run from the latest of --

9 (A) the date on which the judgment became final by
10 the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for
11 seeking such review;

12 (B) the date on which the impediment to filing an
13 application created by State action in violation of the
14 Constitution or laws of the United States is removed, if the
15 applicant was prevented from filing by such State action;

16 (C) the date on which the constitutional right asserted
17 was initially recognized by the Supreme Court, if the right has
18 been newly recognized by the Supreme Court and made
19 retroactively applicable to cases on collateral review; or

20 (D) the date on which the factual predicate of the claim
21 or claims presented could have been discovered through the
22 exercise of due diligence.

23 28 U.S.C. 2244(d)(1). The AEDPA statute of limitations is tolled during the time that a
24 properly filed application for state post-conviction or other collateral review is pending in
25 state court. See 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2).

26 Ayala's conviction became final, for purposes of the statute of limitations, on
27 September 18, 2012, which was ninety days after the Nevada Supreme Court ruled on
28 his direct appeal. See Order of Affirmance, Exh. 122 (ECF No. 16-2). Ayala initiated his
state habeas action 261 days later, on June 6, 2013, tolling the statute of limitations under
28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2). See Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Post-Conviction), Exh.
126 (ECF No. 16-6). Ayala's state habeas action concluded, and the tolling ended, on
June 5, 2017, when the Nevada Supreme Court issued its remittitur after affirming the
denial of his state habeas petition. See Remittitur, Exh. 152 (ECF No. 18-5). The
remaining 104 days of the limitations period ran out on September 17, 2017. Ayala's

1 original federal habeas petition (ECF No. 1-1) was submitted for filing on July 31, 2017,
2 and his first amended petition (ECF No. 8) was filed on September 15, 2017; those
3 petitions were filed before the expiration of the limitations period. Ayala's second
4 amended petition (ECF No. 23), filed January 23, 2018, his third amended petition (ECF
5 No. 37), submitted for filing on May 9, 2019, and his fourth amended petition (ECF No.
6 46), filed on May 13, 2021, were filed after the expiration of the limitations period.

7 Therefore, the question whether the claims in Ayala's fourth amended petition are
8 barred by the statute of limitations turns on whether those claims relate back to his original
9 petition or his first amended petition. In Mayle v. Felix, 545 U.S. 644 (2005), the Supreme
10 Court held that "[s]o long as the original and amended petitions state claims that are tied
11 to a common core of operative facts, relation back will be in order," but "[a]n amended
12 habeas petition ... does not relate back (and thereby escape AEDPA's one-year time limit)
13 when it asserts a new ground for relief supported by facts that differ in both time and type
14 from those the original pleading set forth." Mayle, 545 U.S. at 650, 664.

15 In their motion to dismiss and their reply in support of the motion, with regard to
16 Grounds 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, Respondents do no more
17 than point out that Ayala's fourth amended petition was filed after the expiration of the
18 AEDPA limitations period. See Motion to Dismiss (ECF No. 54), pp. 9–10; Reply (ECF
19 No. 60), pp. 2–4. However, it has long been established that the AEDPA statute of
20 limitations applies on a claim-by-claim basis. See Mardesich v. Cate, 668 F.3d 1164, 1171
21 (9th Cir. 2012) ("Therefore, we hold that AEDPA's one-year statute of limitations in §
22 2244(d)(1) applies to each claim in a habeas application on an individual basis."); see
23 also Pace v. DiGuglielmo, 544 U.S. 408, 415–16 (2005). It is not a defense to any of
24 Ayala's claims for Respondents to simply point out that his fourth amended petition was
25 filed after the expiration of the limitations period. The question is whether any of Ayala's
26 individual claims are barred by the statute of limitations, and that question encompasses
27 the relation-back analysis regarding each individual claim. It takes only a brief reading of
28 Ayala's first and fourth amended petitions to see that Grounds 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10,

1 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 of Ayala’s fourth amended petition are based on practically
2 identical facts as claims in his first amended petition, and it is beyond any reasonable
3 dispute that these claims are not barred by the statute of limitations. Respondents make
4 no argument—even in their reply in support of their motion—that these claims do not
5 relate back to Ayala’s first amended petition. Respondents are cautioned that the Court
6 finds their assertion of the statute of limitations defense in response to these claims to
7 border on the frivolous, and the Court observes that Respondents’ position in this regard
8 has caused a significant waste of resources for the parties and the Court.

9 Ground 1

10 In Ground 1 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
11 constitutional rights were violated as a result of “[t]he state district court’s failure to dismiss
12 the tainted jury pool.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 8–13. This claim is
13 based on the same facts as Ground 1 of Ayala’s first amended petition. See First
14 Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 14–20. Ground 1 relates back to Ayala’s first amended
15 petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

16 Ground 2

17 In Ground 2 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
18 constitutional rights were violated because of “[t]he state district court’s denial of Ayala’s
19 Batson challenge to the State’s striking of two African Americans from the jury pool.”
20 Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 13–14. This claim is based on the same facts
21 as Ground 2 of Ayala’s first amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8),
22 pp. 20–22. Ground 2 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by
23 the statute of limitations.

24 Ground 3

25 In Ground 3 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
26 constitutional rights were violated because of “[t]he state district court’s denial of the
27 motion to sever the trial of the defendants.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp.
28 15–16. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 3 of Ayala’s first amended

1 petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 22–24. Ground 3 relates back to
2 Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

3 Ground 4

4 In Ground 4 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
5 constitutional rights were violated because of prosecutorial misconduct. Fourth Amended
6 Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 16–19. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 4 of
7 Ayala’s first amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 24–26.
8 Ground 4 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute
9 of limitations.

10 Ground 5

11 In Ground 5 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
12 constitutional rights were violated because “the jury was not properly instructed on the
13 elements of second degree murder.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 19–24.
14 This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 5 of Ayala’s first amended petition. See
15 First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 26–30. Ground 5 relates back to Ayala’s first
16 amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

17 Ground 6

18 In Ground 6 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
19 constitutional rights were violated as a result of ineffective assistance of counsel, because
20 his trial counsel failed “to file a motion to suppress [his] statements to police.” Fourth
21 Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 24–27. This claim is based on the same facts as
22 Ground 6A of Ayala’s first amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp.
23 31–37. Ground 6 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the
24 statute of limitations.

25 Ground 8

26 In Ground 8 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
27 constitutional rights were violated because his trial counsel was ineffective for “conceding
28 Ayala’s guilt.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 27–29. This claim is based on

1 the same facts as Ground 6B of Ayala’s first amended petition. See First Amended
2 Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 37–41. Ground 8 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition
3 and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

4 Ground 9

5 In Ground 9 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
6 constitutional rights were violated because his trial counsel was ineffective “for failing to
7 raise a claim of self defense.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 29–31. This
8 claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6C of Ayala’s first amended petition. See
9 First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 41–42. Ground 9 relates back to Ayala’s first
10 amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

11 Ground 10

12 In Ground 10 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
13 constitutional rights were violated because his “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to
14 file a motion to sever his case from that of his co-defendants.” Fourth Amended Petition
15 (ECF No. 46), pp. 31–32. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6D of Ayala’s
16 first amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 42–44. Ground 10
17 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

18 Ground 11

19 In Ground 11 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
20 constitutional rights were violated because his “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to
21 investigate key defense witness Angela Soloranzo.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No.
22 46), pp. 33–34. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6E of Ayala’s first
23 amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 44–45. Ground 11 relates
24 back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

25 Ground 12

26 In Ground 12 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
27 constitutional rights were violated because his “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to
28 introduce shell casings later found at the crime scene.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF

1 No. 46), pp. 34–35. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6F of Ayala’s first
2 amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 45–46. Ground 12 relates
3 back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

4 Ground 13

5 In Ground 13 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
6 constitutional rights were violated because his “[t]rial counsel was ineffective for failing to
7 object to testimony concerning uncharged bad acts.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No.
8 46), pp. 35–37. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6G of Ayala’s first
9 amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 47–49. Ground 13 relates
10 back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

11 Ground 14

12 In Ground 14 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
13 constitutional rights were violated because his “[a]ppellate counsel was ineffective for
14 failing to properly brief an issue of prosecutorial misconduct arising from the State’s
15 improper use of the term “gangsta.” Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 37–39.
16 This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6H of Ayala’s first amended petition.
17 See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 49–51. Ground 14 relates back to Ayala’s
18 first amended petition and is not barred by the statute of limitations.

19 Ground 15

20 In Ground 15 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
21 constitutional rights were violated because his “[a]ppellate counsel was ineffective for
22 failing to raise the claim that Ayala’s sentence was cruel and unusual.” Fourth Amended
23 Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 39–40. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6I of
24 Ayala’s first amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 51–52.
25 Ground 15 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute
26 of limitations.

1 Ground 16

2 In Ground 16 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his federal
3 constitutional rights were violated because his “[a]ppellate counsel was ineffective for
4 failing to raise the claim that the trial court violated Ayala’s right to due process when it
5 improperly canvassed Ayala about trial counsel’s concession of guilt.” Fourth Amended
6 Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 40–42. This claim is based on the same facts as Ground 6J of
7 Ayala’s first amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 53–54.
8 Ground 16 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute
9 of limitations.

10 Ground 17

11 In Ground 17 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that “[t]he cumulative
12 error of trial and appellate counsel’s ineffectiveness” violated Ayala’s federal
13 constitutional rights. Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 42–43. This cumulative
14 error claim is timely to the extent that underlying claims, to be considered cumulatively,
15 are timely. As the Court finds none of Ayala’s claims of ineffective assistance of counsel
16 to be barred by the statute of limitations, this claim, as well, is not barred by the statute of
17 limitations.

18 Ground 18

19 In Ground 18 of his fourth amended petition, Ayala claims that his “waiver of his
20 fundamental right to secured autonomy to decide whether to concede charges to the jury
21 was not knowing, intelligent, or voluntary,” in violation of his federal constitutional rights.
22 Fourth Amended Petition (ECF No. 46), pp. 43–45. The Court determines that the claim
23 in Ground 18 is based on the same core operative facts as Ground 6B of Ayala’s first
24 amended petition. See First Amended Petition (ECF No. 8), pp. 37–41. Specifically, the
25 Court notes that in Ground 6B of his first amended petition, Ayala asserted that he was
26 not properly canvassed regarding his counsel’s alleged concession of guilt. See id.
27 Ground 18 relates back to Ayala’s first amended petition and is not barred by the statute
28 of limitations.

1 **B. Procedural Default – Ground 18**

2 In Coleman v. Thompson, the Supreme Court held that a state prisoner who fails
3 to comply with the state’s procedural requirements in presenting his claims is barred by
4 the adequate and independent state ground doctrine from obtaining a writ of habeas
5 corpus in federal court. Coleman v. Thompson, 501 U.S. 722, 731–32 (1991) (“Just as in
6 those cases in which a state prisoner fails to exhaust state remedies, a habeas petitioner
7 who has failed to meet the State’s procedural requirements for presenting his federal
8 claims has deprived the state courts of an opportunity to address those claims in the first
9 instance.”). Where such a procedural default constitutes an adequate and independent
10 state ground for denial of habeas corpus, the default may be excused only if “a
11 constitutional violation has probably resulted in the conviction of one who is actually
12 innocent,” or if the prisoner demonstrates cause for the default and prejudice resulting
13 from it. Murray v. Carrier, 477 U.S. 478, 496 (1986).

14 Ayala asserted the claim that is Ground 18 in this case in his second state habeas
15 action. See Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (Post-Conviction), Exh. 158 (ECF No. 55-
16 1). The state district court denied Ayala relief on the claim, ruling the claim procedurally
17 barred. See Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order, Exh. 163 (ECF No. 55-6).
18 Ayala appealed, and the Nevada Supreme Court affirmed, ruling as follows:

19 Ayala filed the petition six years after remittitur issued on his direct
20 appeal. Ayala v. State, Docket No. 55933 (Order of Affirmance, June 20,
21 2012). Thus, his petition was untimely filed. See NRS 34.726(1). The
22 petition was also successive because he had previously litigated a
23 postconviction petition for a writ of habeas corpus in which he asserted a
24 similar claim for relief. See NRS 34.810(1)(b)(2); NRS 34.810(2); Ayala v.
25 State, Docket No. 69877 (Order of Affirmance, May 9, 2017). Ayala’s
26 petition was procedurally barred absent a demonstration of good cause and
27 actual prejudice. See NRS 34.726(1); NRS 34.810(3). Good cause may be
28 demonstrated by a showing that the factual or legal basis for a claim was
not reasonably available to be raised in a timely petition. Hathaway v. State,
119 Nev. 248, 252, 71 P.3d 503, 506 (2003). Further, as the State
specifically pleaded laches, Ayala was required to overcome the
presumption of prejudice to the State. See NRS 34.800(2).

 Ayala argues that the Supreme Court’s recent decision in McCoy v.
Louisiana, 138 S.Ct. 1500 (2018), provides good cause. He is mistaken, as
McCoy is distinguishable. McCoy holds that an attorney may not concede a
defendant’s guilt where the defendant expressly objects or insists on

1 maintaining his or her innocence. 138 S.Ct. at 1509. McCoy differentiated
2 a defendant who opposed counsel’s concession from a defendant who
3 “‘was generally unresponsive’ during discussions of trial strategy, and
4 ‘never verbally approved or protested’” the concession. Id. (quoting Florida
5 v. Nixon, 543 U.S. 175, 181 (2004)). Although McCoy noted that the
6 decision to concede was similar in nature to other decisions reserved to a
7 defendant, like “whether to plead guilty, waive the right to a jury trial, testify
8 in one’s own behalf, and forgo an appeal,” id. at 1508, McCoy does not
9 require consent or a canvass. It only requires that counsel not pursue a
10 concession strategy over a defendant’s objection. Id. at 1509–10; see also
11 Nixon, 543 U.S. at 186–92 (rejecting notion that concession strategy
12 requires express consent or that it is the functional equivalent of a guilty
13 plea). [Footnote: Notably, McCoy did not alter the holding in Nixon. McCoy,
14 138 S.Ct. at 1509.] Here, trial counsel admitted in opening statement and
15 closing argument that Ayala committed either voluntary manslaughter or
16 second-degree murder. Counsel, however, strenuously argued that Ayala
17 lacked the requisite intent for first-degree murder. During a canvass after
18 closing arguments, Ayala expressly consented to counsel’s strategy. Ayala
19 never opposed the concession and expressly consented during the
20 canvass. Because McCoy is distinguishable, we need not resolve Ayala’s
21 argument that McCoy applies retroactively. Accordingly, Ayala has not
22 shown that McCoy provides good cause.

23 Ayala has further not demonstrated that the district court erred in
24 determining the petition was barred by laches. The State sufficiently
25 pleaded laches, and prejudice was presumed based on the more-than-five-
26 year period from the decision on direct appeal. NRS 34.800(2). Ayala has
27 not overcome the presumption of prejudice to the State. See NRS 34.800
28 (requiring a petitioner to demonstrate a fundamental miscarriage of justice
when the State is prejudiced in its ability to conduct a retrial and lack of
knowledge or exercise of reasonable diligence when the State is prejudiced
in responding to the petition); see also Pellegrini v. State, 117 Nev. 860,
887, 34 P.3d 519, 537 (2001) (recognizing that fundamental miscarriage of
justice requires a showing of actual innocence).

We conclude that the district court correctly applied the mandatory
procedural bars and did not err in determining the petition was barred by
laches. [Footnote omitted.] See State v. Eighth Judicial Dist. Court (Riker),
121 Nev. 225, 231, 233, 112 P.3d 1070, 1074, 1075 (2005).

Order of Affirmance, Exh. 156, pp. 1–3 (ECF No. 47-3, pp. 2–4).

Ayala argues that “the procedural default imposed by the Nevada Supreme Court
is not based on independent state law grounds.” Opposition to Motion to Dismiss (ECF
No. 57), p. 3; see also id. at 13–17. Specifically, he argues:

The Nevada Supreme Court’s cause and prejudice analysis was not
independent of federal law because it was based on the merits of Ayala’s
federal McCoy claim.

* * *

1 In its determination that Ayala had not demonstrated good cause in
2 order to overcome the procedural default, the Court conducted a full
3 analysis and interpretation of McCoy, federal law. The Court expressed in
4 its opinion that Ayala had not established good cause and did so by
5 evaluating Ayala's McCoy claim.

* * *

6 Because the merits of Ayala's McCoy claim are interwoven with the cause
7 and prejudice analysis of whether Ayala could overcome the procedural
8 default, the Nevada Supreme Court's decision did not rest on an adequate
9 and independent state ground and therefore does not bar federal habeas
10 review.

11 Id. at 15–17.

12 A state procedural bar is “independent” if the state court “explicitly invokes a state
13 procedural bar rule as a separate basis for its decision.” McKenna v. McDaniel, 65 F.3d
14 1483, 1488 (9th Cir. 1995). For the state-law ground to be “independent,” it “must not be
15 interwoven with federal law.” See La Crosse v. Kernan, 244 F.3d 702, 704 (9th Cir. 2001).
16 “A state law ground is so interwoven if ‘the state has made application of the procedural
17 bar depend on an antecedent ruling on federal law [such as] the determination of whether
18 federal constitutional error has been committed.’” Park v. California, 202 F.3d 1146, 1152
19 (9th Cir. 2000) (quoting Ake v. Oklahoma, 470 U.S. 68, 75 (1985)).

20 However, the independence of a state court's application of a state procedural bar
21 is not undermined by the state court's discussion of the merits of a federal claim only to
22 demonstrate that the petitioner does not overcome the procedural bar by a showing of
23 cause and prejudice. See Moran v. McDaniel, 80 F.3d 1261, 1269 (9th Cir. 1996). Ayala's
24 argument fails for this reason. The Nevada Supreme Court explicitly invoked state
25 procedural rules as the bases for its decision, and the court discussed the merits of
26 Ayala's federal claim only to show that he did not show cause and prejudice such as to
27 overcome the procedural bars. Ground 18 is procedurally defaulted, and Ayala does not
28 make any showing to overcome the procedural default. Ground 18 will be dismissed on
this ground.

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IV. Orders

IT IS THEREFORE HEREBY ORDERED that Respondents' Motion to Dismiss (ECF No. 54) is **GRANTED IN PART AND DENIED IN PART**. The Motion to Dismiss is granted with respect to Ground 18 of Petitioner's Fourth Amended Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus (ECF No. 46). Ground 18 is dismissed. The Motion to Dismiss is denied in all other respects.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondents will have 90 days from the date of this order to file an answer, responding to Petitioner's remaining claims. In all other respects, the schedule for further proceedings set forth in the scheduling order entered April 13, 2021 (ECF No. 45) will remain in effect.

DATED THIS 9th day of August, 2022.



RICHARD F. BOULWARE, II
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE