

Serial: **223411**

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSISSIPPI**

**No. 2014-M-01487**

***DONALD MARK EDWARDS***

***Petitioner***

**v.**

***STATE OF MISSISSIPPI***

***Respondent***

**ORDER**

The instant matter is before the Court en banc on Donald Mark Edwards's *pro se* Petition for Writ of Certiorari, which is in the nature of a petition for post-conviction relief and will be treated as such, filed on November 15, 2018. Edwards was convicted of possession of a Schedule II controlled substance and was sentenced, as a habitual offender, to life without parole in the custody of the Mississippi Department of Corrections. Edwards appealed his sentence, claiming that the State did not prove his habitual-offender status and that his sentence was disproportionate. The Court of Appeals affirmed on direct appeal. *Edwards v. State*, 75 So. 3d 73 (Miss. Ct. App. 2011).

After due consideration, the Court finds that Edwards's petition is subject to the time bar. Miss. Code Ann. § 99-39-5 (Rev. 2015). Further, Edwards has had two prior petitions for post-conviction relief denied by the Court on February 27, 2015, and May 16, 2018. Therefore, the instant petition is also successive. Miss. Code Ann. § 99-39-27 (Rev. 2015).

Among other issues, Edwards challenges the legality of his sentence and claims ineffective assistance of counsel, which are recognized exceptions to the procedural bars, but “[t]here must at least appear to be some basis for the truth of the claim before the [procedural bar] will be waived.” *Means v. State*, 43 So. 3d 438, 442 (Miss. 2010). The Court finds that Edwards has not presented an arguable basis for his claims. Edwards fails to meet any exception to the time bar or the bar against successive applications.

Lastly, in its May 16, 2018, order, the Court warned Edwards that future filings that are deemed frivolous may result in sanctions, including monetary sanctions or restrictions on filing applications for post-conviction relief (or pleadings in that nature) *in forma pauperis*. The Court finds that the instant filing is frivolous. Therefore, Edwards should be restricted from filing further petitions for post-conviction relief (or pleadings in that nature) *in forma pauperis* that are related to this conviction and sentence.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the Petition for Writ of Certiorari, which is in the nature of a petition for post-conviction relief and will be treated as such, filed *pro se* by Donald Mark Edwards is denied.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Donald Mark Edwards is hereby restricted from filing further petitions for post-conviction relief (or pleadings in that nature) that are related to this conviction and sentence *in forma pauperis*.

The Clerk of this Court shall not accept for filing any further petitions for post-conviction relief (or pleadings in that nature) *in forma pauperis* from Edwards that are related to this conviction and sentence. *See* Order, **Walton v. State**, 2009-M-00329 (Miss. April 12, 2018).

SO ORDERED, this the 7th day of March, 2019.

/s/ James D. Maxwell II

JAMES D. MAXWELL II, JUSTICE  
FOR THE COURT

**TO DENY AND ISSUE SANCTIONS: RANDOLPH, C.J., COLEMAN, MAXWELL, BEAM, AND GRIFFIS, JJ.**

**TO DISMISS AND ISSUE SANCTIONS: CHAMBERLIN AND ISHEE, JJ.**

**TO DENY: KITCHENS AND KING, P.JJ.**

**KING, P.J., OBJECTS TO THE ORDER IN PART WITH SEPARATE WRITTEN STATEMENT JOINED BY KITCHENS, P.J.**

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSISSIPPI**

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***DONALD MARK EDWARDS***

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**KING, PRESIDING JUSTICE, OBJECTING TO THE ORDER IN PART WITH SEPARATE WRITTEN STATEMENT:**

¶1. Today, this Court prioritizes efficiency over justice and bars Donald Mark Edwards from its doors. Because the imposition of monetary sanctions against indigent defendants and the restriction of access to the court system serve only to punish those defendants and to violate rights guaranteed by the United States and Mississippi Constitutions, I strongly oppose this Court’s order restricting Edwards from filing further petitions for post-conviction collateral relief *in forma pauperis*.

¶2. This Court seems to tire of reading motions that it deems “frivolous” and imposes monetary sanctions on indigent defendants. The Court then bars those defendants, who in all likelihood are unable to pay the imposed sanctions, from future filings. In choosing to prioritize efficiency over justice, this Court forgets the oath that each justice took before assuming office. That oath stated in relevant part, “I . . . solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich. . . .” Edwards has filed a mere two prior petitions for post-conviction relief since 2011. Yet this Court now deems the frequency of Edwards’s filing to be too onerous a burden and

decides to restrict Edwards from filing subsequent applications for post-conviction collateral relief. See *In re McDonald*, 489 U.S. 180, 186–87, 109 S. Ct. 993, 997, 103 L. Ed. 2d 158 (1989) (Brennan, J., dissenting) (“I continue to find puzzling the Court’s fervor in ensuring that rights granted to the poor are not abused, even when so doing actually increases the drain on our limited resources.”).

¶3. Article 3, section 25, of the Mississippi Constitution provides that “no person shall be debarred from prosecuting or defending any civil cause for or against him or herself, before any tribunal in the state, by him or herself, or counsel, or both.” Miss. Const. art. 3, § 26 (emphasis added). Mississippi Code Section 99-39-7 provides that actions under the Uniform Post-Conviction Collateral Relief Act are civil actions. Miss. Code Ann. § 99-39-7 (Rev. 2015). Therefore, this State’s Constitution grants unfettered access in civil causes to any tribunal in the State. The Court’s decision to deny Edwards’s filing actions *in forma pauperis* is a violation of his State constitutional right to have access to the courts.

¶4. The decision to cut off an indigent defendant’s right to proceed *in forma pauperis* is also a violation of that defendant’s fundamental right to vindicate his constitutional rights, for

Among the rights recognized by the Court as being fundamental are the rights to be free from invidious racial discrimination, to marry, to practice their religion, to communicate with free persons, to have due process in disciplinary proceedings, and to be free from cruel and unusual punishment. As a result of the recognition of these and other rights, the right of access to courts, which is necessary to vindicate all constitutional rights, also became a fundamental right.

Joseph T. Lukens, *The Prison Litigation Reform Act: Three Strikes and You're Out of Court-It May Be Effective, but Is It Constitutional?*, 70 Temp. L. Rev. 471, 474–75 (1997).

As United States Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall stated,

In closing its doors today to another indigent litigant, the Court moves ever closer to the day when it leaves an indigent litigant with a meritorious claim out in the cold. And with each barrier that it places in the way of indigent litigants, and with each instance in which it castigates such litigants for having “abused the system,” . . . the Court can only reinforce in the hearts and minds of our society’s less fortunate members the unsettling message that their pleas are not welcome here.

*In re Demos*, 500 U.S. 16, 19, 111 S. Ct. 1569, 1571, 114 L. Ed. 2d 20 (1991) (Marshall, J., dissenting). Instead of simply denying or dismissing those motions that lack merit, the Court seeks to punish Edwards for filing three motions in eight years.

¶5. Although each justice took an oath to do equal right to the poor and rich, this Court does not deny access to the court defendants who are fortunate enough to have monetary resources. Those defendants may file endless petitions, while indigent defendants are forced to sit silently by. An individual who, even incorrectly, believes that she has been deprived of her freedom should not be expected to sit silently by and wait to be forgotten. “Historically, the convictions with the best chances of being overturned were those that got *repeatedly reviewed on appeal* or those chosen by legal institutions such as the Innocence Project and the Center on Wrongful Convictions.” Emily Barone, *The Wrongly Convicted: Why more falsely accused people are being exonerated today than ever before*, Time, <http://time.com/wrongly-convicted/> (last visited November 1, 2018) (emphasis added). The Washington Post reports that

the average time served for the 1,625 exonerated individuals in the registry is more than nine years. Last year, three innocent murder defendants in Cleveland were exonerated 39 years after they were convicted—they spent their entire adult lives in prison—and even they were lucky: We know without doubt that the vast majority of innocent defendants who are convicted of crimes are never identified and cleared.

Samuel Gross, Opinion, *The Staggering Number of Wrongful Convictions in America*, Washington Post (July 24, 2015), [http://wapo.st/1SGHcyd?tid=ss\\_mail&utm\\_term=.4bed8ad6f2cc](http://wapo.st/1SGHcyd?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.4bed8ad6f2cc).

¶6. Rather than violating Edwards’s fundamental rights by restricting his access to the courts, I would simply deny his petition for post-conviction relief.

**KITCHENS, P.J., JOINS THIS SEPARATE WRITTEN STATEMENT.**