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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA

CIV 10-00443 PHX MHM (MEA)

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Petitioner,

BRIAN ALLEN WILKINS,

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE STATE

Respondents.

TO THE HONORABLE MARY H. MURGUIA:

On or about March 1, 2010, Petitioner filed a pro se petition seeking a writ of habeas corpus pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Petitioner filed exhibits in support of his request for habeas relief. See Docket No. 3 & Docket No. 7. Respondents filed a motion to dismiss the petition on April 29, 2010. Docket No. 14 ("Motion"). On March 10, 2010, Petitioner filed a response to the motion to dismiss his habeas petition. See Docket No. 15.

I Procedural background

A grand jury indictment filed in the Maricopa County Superior Court on July 31, 2008, charged Petitioner with one count each of unlawful discharge of a firearm, disorderly conduct, possession of marijuana, and possession of drug paraphernalia. <u>See Motion</u>, Exh. A. The charges arose from an altercation between Petitioner and a neighbor, during which altercation Petitioner brandished and fired a weapon; it was not alleged that Petitioner fired the weapon at any individual. Id., Exh. A. See also Docket No. 7, Exh. Q.

Pursuant to a written plea agreement dated as signed by Petitioner on March 2, 2009, and dated as signed by his counsel on March 2, 2006, and dated as signed by the prosecutor on September 9, 2008, Petitioner pled guilty to disorderly conduct and possession of drug paraphernalia. See Docket No. 3, Exh. A & Motion, Exh. C. The plea agreement states that it expires or would be revoked if not accepted on or before March 2, 2009. Docket No. 3, Exh. A. The date March 2, 2009, is handwritten above a crossed-out date of October 22, 2008. Id., Exh. A.

The plea agreement provided Petitioner would plead guilty to the charge of disorderly conduct, "a class 6 undesignated offense". Id., Exh. A. The plea agreement stated that the trial court could designate the disorderly conduct offense as a felony or leave the charge undesignated at the time of sentencing. The plea agreement did not state an agreement with regard to whether Petitioner would be sentenced to prison or placed on probation pursuant to his guilty plea on the disorderly conduct charge. Id., Exh. A. Regarding Petitioner's plea of guilty to the drug paraphernalia charge, the parties agreed Petitioner would be placed on probation, pay a fine and perform community service. Id., Exh. A. The plea agreement provided that the other counts of the indictment would be

dismissed and the allegation of dangerousness would be dismissed. Id., Exh. A.

A hearing was conducted on March 2, 2009, regarding Petitioner's guilty plea. <u>See</u> Docket No. 7, Exh. T. Petitioner was sentenced on March 30, 2009. <u>See</u> Motion, Exh. B & Docket No. 3, Exh. G. The state court suspended sentence and ordered Petitioner to serve concurrent, one-year terms of probation for each offense, dating from March 30, 2009. Motion, Exh. B. Petitioner was further ordered to serve a jail term of 30 days as a term of probation pursuant to his conviction for disorderly conduct, with credit for the 30 days served after his arrest. <u>See id.</u>, Exh. B. Petitioner was further ordered to pay fines and surcharges and sentenced to a term of community service. <u>See id.</u>, Exh. B.

On July 13, 2009, Petitioner filed a pro per petition for state post-conviction relief pursuant to Rule 32, Arizona Rules of Criminal Procedure. See Motion, Exh. D. Petitioner indicated he did not wish the appointment of counsel in his Rule 32 proceedings. See Docket No. 7, Exh. M. Petitioner argued he was entitled to relief because: he was denied the effective assistance of counsel; the state improperly suppressed evidence in Petitioner's criminal proceedings; his guilty plea was unlawfully induced; and his federal constitutional rights were violated, including his rights pursuant to the Fifth, Sixth,

 $^{^{\}rm 1}$ On May 1, 2009, Petitioner filed an action for federal habeas relief, which was dismissed without prejudice for failure to exhaust his claims in the state courts. See CV 09-927 MHM MEA.

Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments. <u>See id.</u>, Exh. D & Docket No. 7, Exh. H.

On or about September 14, 2009, Petitioner filed a special action in the Arizona Court of Appeals, asserting the trial court had failed to act on his Rule 32 petition in a timely fashion, and seeking de novo review of the claims raised in his Rule 32 action. See Petition at 4 & Docket No. 7, Exh. I.

The state trial court denied relief and dismissed Petitioner's Rule 32 action in a decision issued September 25, 2009. See Docket No. 3, Exh. B. The state court determined: "Based upon the matters presented the Court finds that the defendant has failed to show any colorable claim for relief pursuant to Rule 32.1 of the Arizona Rules of Criminal Procedure. It is ordered dismissing the petition pursuant to Rule 32.6(c) of the Arizona Rules of Criminal Procedure."

See id., Exh. B.

On October 2, 2010, the Arizona Supreme Court declined to review the Court of Appeals' decision denying relief in Petitioner's special action and also denied Petitioner's motion to consolidate his special action with his Rule 32 proceedings. See Docket No. 3, Exh. C.

On October 8, 2009, Petitioner sought review of the trial court's decision denying his Rule 32 petition by the Arizona Court of Appeals. Petitioner alleged he was entitled to relief because he was denied his right to a speedy jury trial, he was denied his right to the effective assistance of counsel,

he was denied his right to represent himself, his guilty plea was unlawfully induced, and he was denied his right to counsel at his arraignment. Petitioner further asserted that the state improperly suppressed evidence and that his right to due process was violated because the state fabricated evidence and used falsified evidence. The state filed a brief in the Court of Appeals asserting that summary dismissal of the Rule 32 petition was correct. See Docket No. 3, Exh. E

On January 20, 2010, Petitioner filed a pleading in the state appellate court, "[c]orrecting [e]rrors" in his petition for review of the Arizona trial court's decision dismissing his Rule 32 action. See Motion, Exh. G.

Petitioner filed his federal habeas action on March 1, 2009. In the petition he asserts he is entitled to relief because:

- 1. He was denied his right to a jury trial and to a speedy trial in violation of the Sixth Amendment. Petitioner contends the trial court violated his constitutional rights by sua sponte continuing his trial date from January 20, 2009. Petitioner argues the trial judge violated his right to a jury trial and a speedy trial in order to "force him" into signing a plea agreement.
- 2. He was denied his right to the effective assistance of counsel. Petitioner alleges that his first public defender encouraged Petitioner to accept a plea agreement providing a year in prison without investigating the circumstances of his case. Petitioner contends this public defender's performance

was deficient because the number of cases assigned to this individual exceeded a limit set by the Arizona Supreme Court. Petitioner also asserts his first counsel did not appear at his arraignment. Petitioner contends his second public defender allowed trial dates to be improperly vacated and that counsel told Petitioner he would be incarcerated if he did not accept the plea agreement. Petitioner alleges his second counsel erred by not obtaining evidence of an extortion attempt by the neighbor involved in the altercation sent to Petitioner electronically on the night of the altercation.² Petitioner asserts his third counsel erred by failing to object when the trial court accepted the "expired" plea agreement.

- 3. He was denied his right to represent himself in his criminal proceedings, invoked in an August 2008 motion to modify his release conditions, based on his dissatisfaction with his public defender.
- 4. He was denied his Sixth Amendment right to have counsel present at all critical stages of his criminal proceedings and his right to procedural due process of law because counsel was not present at his arraignment and the court did not appoint advisory counsel in his Rule 32 proceedings.
- 5. He was denied his right to due process of law because the state fabricated evidence, including a false prior criminal charge, used to elevate his crimes to dangerous crimes

² Attached to Petitioner's pleadings are defense counsel's subpoenas for records from Spring regarding Petitioner's cell phone dated October 7, 2008, and January 8, 2009. <u>See</u> Docket No. 7, Exh. O.

and provide further bargaining power for the state with regard to a plea agreement.

- 6. He was held on excessive bond, set at \$54,000, based on his race and the fact that the altercation was "sensationalized" by local media. Petitioner notes he was eventually released without bond on the motion of his counsel.
- 7. He was denied his right to due process because each of the four state trial court judges who signed orders in his criminal proceedings did so in excess of their jurisdiction.
- 8. The state impeded his ability to appeal his criminal convictions and sentences. Petitioner asserts his probation officer seized a tape recorder Petitioner intended to use to tape conversations between himself and the officer. Petitioner contends the officer improperly approached a state judge to revoke probation and impose a term of imprisonment based on Petitioner's stated intent to appeal his convictions and sentences.
- 9. He was denied his right to due process because the state trial court accepted an expired plea agreement.
- 10. He was denied his right to due process of law because the state improperly suppressed evidence, i.e., grand jury transcripts. Petitioner contends the state improperly withheld from the grand jury the fact that the victim was intoxicated and on probation when the altercation occurred and that the victim had extorted and assaulted Petitioner prior to his acts.

In his federal habeas petition Petitioner states that, at that time, his appeal of the state trial court's decision dismissing his Rule 32 petition was pending before the state Court of Appeals.

In their motion to dismiss the habeas petition filed April 29, 2010, Respondents contend that Petitioner did not exhaust his claims in the state courts prior to bringing this section 2254 action and, accordingly, that the petition must be dismissed. Respondents aver that, as of April 29, 2010, the Arizona Court of Appeals has not issued a ruling on Petitioner's petition for review. Respondents assert that the state Court of Appeals could render the federal habeas proceedings moot. Respondents argue that, therefore, Petitioner's habeas claim is premature and must be dismissed for failure to exhaust state remedies. Respondents state:

Petitioner filed in this Court a previous petition for writ of habeas corpus requesting "vacating, with prejudice, judgment and forced plea agreement" entered in <u>State v. Wilkins</u>, Maricopa County Superior Court No. CR2008-145947, which is the same criminal case at issue in the petition for writ of habeas corpus. 09-CV-927-MHM-MEA. By order filed June 9, 2009, the Court dismissed the Second Amended "failure to Petition for exhaust remedies." <u>See</u> Docket 11, 09-CV-927-MHM-MEA. On December 7, 2009, this Court denied Petitioner's "Motion for Relief from an that Order" filed in matter, wherein Petitioner requested the Court reverse its order of dismissal and allow Petitioner leave to file a third amended petition.

Id. at n.1.

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Petitioner contends that exhausting his claims in the state courts "will not work..." Docket No. 15 at 1. Petitioner asserts he was forced to file a special action in the state courts because his efforts to properly proceed in his Rule 32 action were not facilitated by the state courts. Petitioner asserts the state trial court erred by denying relief in his Rule 32 action without addressing the merits of his claims.

Petitioner further contends that the state courts have violated his federal constitutional rights. Petitioner alleges that his probation was prematurely discharged on March 5, 2010, in an effort to prevent him from seeking federal habeas relief.

Petitioner filed a second special action on October 2, 2009, and on February 17, 2010, the Arizona Supreme Court denied review of the Arizona Court of Appeals' decision denying special action relief. See Petition at 6 & Docket No. 3, Exh. D. The public docket in Petitioner's criminal proceedings reflects that the Arizona Court of Appeals issued an order in Petitioner's case on March 24, 2010. The public docket indicates that, in the order of March 24, 2010, the appellate court declined review of a special action, but it is unclear from the record before this Court what special action was pending before the state appellate court since that order was entered subsequent to the state Supreme Court's order of February 17, 2010, dismissing the special action filed October 2, 2009.

The public docket in Petitioner's criminal proceedings indicates that a discharge of order of probation was entered on March 8, 2010. Additionally, on April 22, 2010, an order of

discharge of probation was entered.

II Analysis

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A. Jurisdiction

The United States District Courts have the power to grant a writ of habeas corpus only to individuals "in custody in violation of the Constitution or laws or treaties of the United States". Maleng v. Cook, 490 U.S. 488, 490, 109 S. Ct. 1923, 1925 (1989), <u>citing</u> 28 U.S.C. § 2241(c)(3)). See also 28 U.S.C. § 2254(a). Custody is determined on the date that a habeas petition is first filed. <u>See Carafas v. LaVallee</u>, 391 U.S. 234, 238-40, 88 S. Ct. 1556, 1559 (1968); Spencer v. Kemna, 523 U.S. 1, 7, 118 S. Ct. 978, 983 (1998). The Ninth Circuit has stated that "a petitioner is 'in custody' for the purposes of habeas jurisdiction while he remains on probation." Chaker v. Croqan, 428 F.3d 1215, 1219 (9th Cir. 2005). Once a defendant is discharged from probation or parole, he is no longer "in custody." <u>See</u>, <u>e.g.</u>, <u>Henry v. Lungren</u>, 164 F.3d 1240, 1241 (9th Cir. 1999). At the time he filed his habeas action Petitioner was still on probation for both counts of conviction, which were not discharged any sooner than March 8, 2010. Accordingly, the Court may properly exercise jurisdiction over the petition.

B. Mootness

Neither is the habeas petition moot. Article III, § 2 of the Constitution requires the existence of a case or controversy through all stages of a federal judicial proceeding. Accordingly, throughout the entire proceedings, the petitioner

"must have suffered, or be threatened with, an actual injury ... likely to be redressed by a favorable judicial decision." Spencer v. Kemna, 523 U.S. 1, 7, 118 S. Ct. 978, 983 (1998), quoting Lewis v. Continental Bank Corp., 494 U.S. 472, 477, 110 S. Ct. 1249, 1253-54 (1990).

[E] ven if the probationary period has expired by now, a petition for habeas relief is not moot, so long as the petition was filed during the probationary period and conviction will have adverse collateral consequences. <u>See Carafas v. LaVallee</u>, 391 U.S. 234, 237-40, 88 S. Ct. 1556, 1559-1561, [] (1968). The record on appeal does not reveal whether these conditions were met; thus, on remand, the district court will have to determine whether habeas relief may be available. Although the court obviously cannot discharge the appellant from custody if he is not in custody, the court may grant other relief that it deems equitable. Id. at 239, 88 S. Ct. at 1560.

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Olson v. Hart, 965 F.2d 940, 943 (10th 1992).

Petitioner filed his habeas action before the discharge of probation. Petitioner has alleged adverse collateral consequences arising from his convictions. Accordingly, the petition is not moot despite the fact that Petitioner is not currently serving a term of incarceration or probation.

C. Exhaustion

The District Court may only grant federal habeas relief on the merits of a claim which has been exhausted in the state courts. See O'Sullivan v. Boerckel, 526 U.S. 838, 842, 119 S. Ct. 1728, 1731 (1999); Coleman v. Thompson, 501 U.S. 722, 729-30, 111 S. Ct. 2546, 2554-55 (1991). To properly exhaust a federal habeas claim, the petitioner must afford the state the

opportunity to rule upon the merits of the claim by "fairly presenting" the claim to the state's "highest" court in a procedurally correct manner. <u>See</u>, <u>e.g.</u>, <u>Castille v. Peoples</u>, 489 U.S. 346, 351, 109 S. Ct. 1056, 1060 (1989); <u>Rose</u> v.Palmateer, 395 F.3d 1108, 1110 (9th Cir. 2005).

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has concluded that, in cases arising in Arizona in which the sentence imposed is not a capital sentence, the "highest court" test of the exhaustion requirement is satisfied if the habeas petitioner presented his claim to the Arizona Court of Appeals, either on direct appeal or in a petition for post-conviction relief. See Swoopes v. <u>Sublett</u>, 196 F.3d 1008, 1010 (9th Cir. 1999). <u>See also Paige v.</u> Schriro, 648 F. Supp. 2d 1151, 1168-69 (D. Ariz. 2009); Crowell v. Knowles, 483 F. Supp. 2d 925, 932 (D. Ariz. 2007). Petitioner's plea agreement waived his right to a direct appeal. Accordingly, any claim not presented to the Arizona Court of Appeals in his Rule 32 action has not been completely exhausted. <u>See Paige</u>, 648 F. Supp. 2d at 1168-69.

A federal habeas petitioner has not exhausted a federal habeas claim if he still has the right to raise the claim "by any available procedure" in the state courts. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(c) (1994 & Supp. 2009). Because the exhaustion requirement refers only to remedies still available to the petitioner at the time they file their action for federal habeas relief, it is satisfied if the petitioner is clearly procedurally barred from pursuing their claim in the state courts. See Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 126 S. Ct. 2378, 2387 (2006); Castille, 489 U.S. at

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351, 109 S. Ct. at 1060. If it is clear the habeas petitioner's claim is procedurally barred pursuant to state law, the claim is exhausted by virtue of the petitioner's "procedural default" of the claim. See, e.g., Woodford, 126 S. Ct. at 2387.

We recognize two types of procedural bars: express and implied. An express procedural bar occurs when the petitioner has presented his claim to the state courts and the state courts have relied on a state procedural rule to deny or dismiss the claim. An implied procedural bar, on the other hand, occurs when the petitioner has failed to fairly present his claims to the highest state court and would now be barred by a state procedural rule from doing so.

Robinson v. Schriro, 595 F.3d 1086, 1100 (9th Cir. 2010).

With regard to claims that were expressly barred by the state courts:

The doctrine of procedural default provides that a federal habeas court may not review constitutional claims when a state court has declined to consider their merits on the basis of an adequate and independent state procedural rule. A state procedural rule is adequate if it is regularly or consistently applied by the state courts and it independent if it does not depend on federal constitutional ruling. Where a state procedural rule both adequate is independent, it will bar consideration of the merits of claims on habeas review unless the petitioner demonstrates cause for the default and prejudice resulting therefrom or that a failure to consider the claims will result in a fundamental miscarriage of justice.

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McNeill v. Polk, 476 F.3d 206, 211 (4th Cir. 2007) (internal
citations and quotations omitted). See also Stewart v. Smith,
536 U.S. 856, 860, 122 S. Ct. 2578, 2582 (2002); Johnson v.
Mississippi, 486 U.S. 578, 587, 108 S. Ct. 1981, 1987 (1988).

Petitioner's appeal of the trial court's decision denying Rule 32 relief is apparently still pending in the Arizona Court of Appeals. The matter has now been fully briefed for approximately six or seven months. The state has argued to the Court of Appeals that Petitioner's ineffective assistance of counsel claims are not colorable and that Petitioner's other claims for relief from his convictions were waived bу Petitioner's guilty plea. It is possible the state appellate court will grant relief and it is possible that the state appellate court will deny relief based on a state procedural rule. At this time, Petitioner's claims have not been denied based on their merits or based on a procedural rule.

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³ In Arizona, claims not previously presented to the state courts via either direct appeal or collateral review are generally barred from federal review because an attempt to return to state court to present them is futile unless the claims fit in a narrow category of claims for which a successive petition is permitted. See Ariz. R. Crim. P. 32.1(d)-(h) & 32.2(a) (precluding claims not raised on appeal or in prior petitions for post-conviction relief, except for narrow See also Ariz. R. Crim. P. 32.4 (time bar). Because exceptions). Arizona's preclusion rule, Rule 32.2(a), has been found both "independent" and "adequate," either its specific application to a claim by an Arizona court, or its operation to preclude a return to state court to exhaust a claim, will procedurally bar subsequent review of the merits of that claim by a federal habeas court. 536 U.S. at 860 (determinations made under Arizona's procedural default rule are "independent" of federal law); <u>Smith v. Stewart</u>, 241 F.3d 1191, 1195 n.2 (9th Cir. 2001) ("We have held that Arizona's procedural default rule is regularly followed ["adequate"] in several cases.") (citations omitted); Ortiz v. Stewart, 149 F.3d 923, 931-32 (rejecting argument that Arizona courts have not "strictly or regularly followed" Rule 32 of Arizona Rules of Criminal Procedure).

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Presented with unexhausted claims which are still pending in the state courts, the Court could dismiss the habeas petition without prejudice presumably without adverse consequences to Petitioner. However it is unclear if the statute of limitations is again running against Petitioner, i.e., if the appellate court has rendered a decision in his appeal of the trial court's dismissal of his Rule 32 petition.

III Conclusion

The AEDPA requires that a petition be filed in federal district court before the end of the one-year statute of limitations period, see 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d), and that the petition not be granted until, if at all, all claims contained in the petition have been exhausted at the state level. See 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1). Therefore, a habeas petition may be filed but not granted prior to total exhaustion of state remedies, and a stay pending exhaustion is perfectly consistent with these rules.

If the state appellate court has affirmed the trial court's decision denying Rule 32 relief, either on the merits of those claims or based on a procedural rule, then the Court should review that decision to properly determine if Petitioner is entitled to relief based on the standard stated in section 2254. If Petitioner's Rule 32 action is still pending in the Arizona Court of Appeals, then Petitioner has neither fully exhausted nor procedurally defaulted his federal habeas claims.

Accordingly,

IT IS RECOMMENDED that the motion to dismiss [Docket No. 14] based on a failure to exhaust state court remedies be denied, and

IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED that this habeas action be stayed pending the future filing by either party of the Arizona Court of Appeals' decision with regard to its review of the state trial court's denial of relief in Petitioner's Rule 32 action.

This recommendation is not an order that is immediately appealable to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Any notice of appeal pursuant to Rule 4(a)(1), Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, should not be filed until entry of the district court's judgment.

Pursuant to Rule 72(b), Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, the parties shall have fourteen (14) days from the date of service of a copy of this recommendation within which to file specific written objections with the Court. Thereafter, the parties have fourteen (14) days within which to file a response to the objections. Pursuant to Rule 7.2, Local Rules of Civil Procedure for the United States District Court for the District of Arizona, objections to the Report and Recommendation may not exceed seventeen (17) pages in length.

Failure to timely file objections to any factual or legal determinations of the Magistrate Judge will be considered a waiver of a party's right to de novo appellate consideration of the issues. See United States v. Reyna-Tapia, 328 F.3d 1114,

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1121 (9th Cir. 2003) (en banc). Failure to timely file objections to any factual or legal determinations of the Magistrate Judge will constitute a waiver of a party's right to appellate review of the findings of fact and conclusions of law in an order or judgment entered pursuant to the recommendation of the Magistrate Judge.

United States Magistrate Judge

DATED this 24th day of June, 2010.

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