

Serial: [227227](#)

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSISSIPPI

No. 2016-M-00176

***RODOLFO ESPINOZA A/K/A RODOLFO
MEDRANO ESPINOZA***

Petitioner

v.

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Respondent

EN BANC ORDER

This matter is before the Court on the Application for Leave to Proceed in the Trial Court filed pro se by Rodolfo Espinoza, who challenges the validity of his enhanced sentence. The mandate in Espinoza's direct appeal issued in 1999. The petition is subject to the time bar. Miss. Code Ann. § 99-39-5 (Rev. 2015). Further, Espinoza has filed at least four prior petitions for post-conviction relief, so this filing is successive. Miss. Code Ann. § 99-39-27 (Rev. 2015). After due consideration, the Court finds that Espinoza has presented no arguable basis for his claim and that the petition should be denied. *See Means v. State*, 43 So. 3d 438, 442 (Miss. 2010). Further, the Court finds that the petition is frivolous. Espinoza is warned that future filings deemed frivolous could result in monetary sanctions or in restrictions on his ability to file applications for post-conviction collateral relief (or pleadings in that nature) *in forma pauperis*. Order, *Dunn v. State*, 2016-M-01514 (Miss. Nov. 15, 2018).

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the Application for Leave to Proceed in the Trial

Court on Post-Conviction Collateral Relief filed pro se by Rodolfo Espinoza is denied.

SO ORDERED, this the 31st day of July, 2019.

/s/ James D. Maxwell II

JAMES D. MAXWELL II, JUSTICE
FOR THE COURT

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

TO DISMISS: KITCHENS AND KING, P.JJ.

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

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

¶1. Although Rodolfo Espinoza’s application for post-conviction relief does not merit relief, I disagree with the Court’s finding that the application is frivolous and with the warning that future filings deemed frivolous may result in monetary sanctions or restrictions on filing applications for post-conviction collateral relief *in forma pauperis*.¹

¶2. This Court previously has defined a frivolous motion to mean one filed in which the movant has “no hope of success.” *Roland v. State*, 666 So. 2d 747, 751 (Miss. 1995). However, “though a case may be weak or ‘light-headed,’ that is not sufficient to label it frivolous.” *Calhoun v. State*, 849 So. 2d 892, 897 (Miss. 2003). In his application for post-conviction relief, Espinoza made reasonable arguments that his sentence is illegal. As such, I disagree with the Court’s determination that Espinoza’s application is frivolous.

¹See Order, *Dunn v. State*, 2016-M-01514 (Miss. Nov. 15, 2018).

¶3. Additionally, I disagree with this Court’s warning that future filings may result in monetary sanctions or restrictions on filing applications for post-conviction collateral relief *in forma pauperis*. The imposition of monetary sanctions on a criminal defendant proceeding *in forma pauperis* only serves to punish or preclude that defendant from his lawful right to appeal. Black’s Law Dictionary defines sanction as “[a] provision that gives force to a legal imperative by either rewarding obedience or *punishing disobedience*.” *Sanction*, Black’s Law Dictionary (10th ed. 2014) (emphasis added). Instead of punishing the defendant for filing a motion, I believe that this Court should simply deny or dismiss motions that lack merit. As Justice Brennan wisely stated,

The Court’s order purports to be motivated by this litigant’s disproportionate consumption of the Court’s time and resources. Yet if his filings are truly as repetitious as it appears, it hardly takes much time to identify them as such. I find it difficult to see how the amount of time and resources required to deal properly with McDonald’s petitions could be so great as to justify the step we now take. Indeed, the time that has been consumed in the preparation of the present order barring the door to Mr. McDonald far exceeds that which would have been necessary to process his petitions for the next several years at least. 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.

In re McDonald, 489 U.S. 180, 186–87, 109 S. Ct. 993, 997, 103 L. Ed. 2d 158 (1989) (Brennan, J., dissenting).²

²See also *In re Demos*, 500 U.S. 16, 19, 111 S. Ct. 1569, 1571, 114 L. Ed. 2d 20 (1991) (Marshall, J., dissenting) (“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,’ . . .

¶4. The same logic applies to the restriction on filing subsequent applications for post-conviction relief. To cut off an indigent defendant’s right to proceed *in forma pauperis* is to cut off his access to the courts. This, in itself, violates a defendant’s 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).

This Court must not discourage convicted defendants from exercising their right to appeal. *Wisconsin v. Glick*, 782 F.2d 670, 673 (7th Cir. 1986). Novel arguments that might remove a criminal defendant from confinement should not be discouraged by the threat of monetary sanctions and restrictions on filings. *Id.*

¶5. Therefore, although I find no merit in Espinoza’s application for post-conviction relief, I disagree with this Court’s contention that the application merits the classification of frivolous and with its warning of future sanctions and restrictions.

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

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.”).