



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS

# GUIDEBOOK

## FOR PETITIONS FOR WRITS OF HABEAS

### CORPUS UNDER 28 U.S.C. § 2241

July 2024

This Guidebook is intended to be an informative and practical resource for understanding the basic procedures of the Court. The statements in this Guidebook do not constitute legal advice. DO NOT CITE THIS GUIDEBOOK AS AUTHORITY. This Guidebook does not take the place of the Federal Rules, this Court's Local Rules, or the individual practices of the Judges of this Court. All parties using this Guidebook remain responsible for complying with all applicable rules of procedure. If there is any conflict between this Guidebook and the applicable rules, the rules govern.



## **INTRODUCTION**

This Guidebook is intended to help you understand the procedures that you must follow if you represent yourself in this Court. This Guidebook, however, is not legal advice. Furthermore, you cannot rely on this Guidebook alone because it does not address every situation that might arise in your case, and it does not offer any information about the specific issues in your case.

The Court encourages you to review this Guidebook together with Title 28 of the United States Code (“U.S.C.”) Section 2241 (28 U.S.C. § 2241); the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts; the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure; and the Court’s Local Rules. If you are a prisoner, the United States Code should be available in your prison law library. The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure appear at the end of Title 28 of the United States Code. The Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases appear immediately after 28 U.S.C. § 2254 in the United States Code. Each of these resources is also available online.

This Guidebook is organized in the sequence that a habeas petition proceeds through the Court and is written in a question-and-answer format. The Table of Contents below identifies each question that is addressed by this Guidebook.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
What is the Clerk's Office?.....	4
How do I contact the Clerk's Office?.....	4
What does it mean to file documents with the Clerk's Office? .....	5
What is a district judge? .....	5
What is a magistrate judge?.....	6
What is consent to the jurisdiction of a magistrate judge?.....	6
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE BASICS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
What is a petition for writ of habeas corpus? .....	7
Where should a habeas petition be filed? .....	7
Do I meet the "in custody" requirement?.....	8
Am I required to exhaust alternative remedies before filing my habeas petition? ....	8
What type of relief is available if a petition is granted? .....	8
Can I amend my habeas petition after I file it? .....	9
What is a habeas petition "brought pursuant to § 2241"?.....	9
<b>CHAPTER THREE: STARTING A § 2241 PROCEEDING.....</b>	<b>11</b>
How do I start a § 2241 proceeding? .....	11
How do I write a petition for a writ of habeas corpus? .....	11
Whom should I name as the respondent on the habeas corpus petition? .....	12
How should I identify the facts supporting my claims? .....	12
May I file attachments with my petition?.....	12
May I file a memorandum of law with my petition? .....	13
Do I need to notarize the petition? .....	13
What is a civil cover sheet? .....	13
How do I pay the filing fee? .....	14
What if I cannot afford the filing fee? .....	14
Do I need to serve a copy of my petition? .....	14
May I request appointment of counsel?.....	14
How can I find out when my petition was received by the Clerk's Office? .....	15
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: INITIAL REVIEW .....</b>	<b>16</b>
What is initial review? .....	16
How will I know the results of the initial review? .....	16
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: THE HABEAS PROCEEDINGS .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Will the government respond to the motion? .....	17
May I reply to the respondent's answer? .....	17
Is discovery allowed? .....	17
Will there be an evidentiary hearing? .....	18
Will there be a hearing before the judge decides my case?.....	18
How do I object to an adverse Report and Recommendation? .....	18
<b>CHAPTER SIX: JUDGMENT AND APPEAL .....</b>	<b>19</b>



What do I need to do to file an appeal? .....	19
How do I file an appeal? .....	19
How much time do I have to begin my appeal?.....	19
May I request appointment of counsel on appeal? .....	20

Map of the District at the end of the Guidebook



## CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INFORMATION

### *What is the Clerk's Office?*

The Clerk's Office maintains the Court's records. Most of your interactions with the Court will be through the Clerk's Office, where you will file the documents that will be reviewed by the judge. The Clerk's Office cannot give you legal advice or tell you when a judge might make a decision in your case, but the Clerk's Office can tell you whether a particular document has been filed and can provide copies of documents in the court record at a cost of \$.50 per page (payable in advance).

### *How do I contact the Clerk's Office?*

You may contact the Clerk's Office at the following addresses and phone numbers:

Fort Smith and Hot Springs Divisions:

United States District Court Clerk's Office  
30 South 6th Street, Rm. 1038  
Fort Smith, AR 72901-2437  
479-783-6833

Fayetteville and Harrison Divisions:

United States District Clerk's Office  
35 E. Mountain, Rm. 510  
Fayetteville, AR 72701-5354  
479-521-6980

Texarkana and El Dorado Divisions:

United States District Clerk's Office  
500 North State Line Avenue, Rm. 302  
Texarkana, AR 71854-5961  
870-773-3381



The **Court's website** is located at <https://www.arwd.uscourts.gov> and will be referred to throughout this Guidebook.

### *What does it mean to file documents with the Clerk's Office?*

The Clerk's Office receives documents on behalf of the Court and maintains a record of the documents received. By filing a document with the Clerk's Office, you ensure that the document becomes part of the official record in your case. This record allows you and the other parties and the judges to be certain of what documents have been presented in a case.

You may file any document, including a habeas petition, either by mailing the document to the Clerk's Office or by having the document personally delivered to the Clerk's Office during business hours. After receiving your documents, the Clerk's Office will record (or "docket") your papers and send them to the judge assigned to your case.

### *What is a district judge?*

A federal district judge is a judicial officer appointed under Article III of the United States Constitution. District judges are authorized to make any decision in your case. Some decisions, such as whether a claim should be dismissed, may only be made by the district judge unless all the parties have consented to those decisions being made by a magistrate judge.



### ***What is a magistrate judge?***

A federal magistrate judge is a judicial officer who has some, but not all, of the powers of a district judge appointed under Article III of the United States Constitution. Magistrate judges may (among other things) set deadlines, enter orders on scheduling, and issue Reports and Recommendations regarding whether your habeas petition should be granted or denied. You may object to any order or any portion of a Report and Recommendation entered by a magistrate judge in your case, and your objection will be reviewed by a district judge. Local Rule 72.1 explains more about the role of magistrate judges.

### ***What is consent to the jurisdiction of a magistrate judge?***

If all parties consent to the jurisdiction of the magistrate judge, the magistrate judge may make all decisions in the case including determining whether your petition should be granted or denied. The decision of the magistrate judge may be appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.



## CHAPTER TWO: THE BASICS

### *What is a petition for writ of habeas corpus?*

A petition for a writ of habeas corpus is a request by a person in custody for the Court to review the legality of their detention. Under 28 U.S.C. § 2241(c), the Court may issue a writ of habeas corpus where a prisoner establishes that he is in custody in violation of the Constitution or laws or treaties of the United States.

### *Where should a habeas petition be filed?*

The State of Arkansas is divided into two judicial districts—the Western District of Arkansas and the Eastern District of Arkansas. If you are in custody under the judgment and sentence of a **state court**, section 28 U.S.C. 2241(d) provides that your habeas petition may be filed in one of two districts. Either in the federal judicial district in which you are detained **or** in the federal judicial district in which you were convicted **if those districts are different**.

If you are in custody under the judgment and sentence of a **federal court**, a habeas petition usually must be filed in the federal judicial where you are detained, not the district in which you were convicted (if those districts differ).

Prisoners being detained outside the State of Arkansas generally must seek habeas relief in a venue other than the Arkansas Federal District Courts. At the end of this Guidebook, is a map of Arkansas showing how the districts are divided.





***Do I meet the “in custody” requirement?***

A petitioner cannot seek a writ of habeas corpus unless he is being held “in custody” at the time that the habeas corpus petition is filed. The “in custody” requirement sometimes, though not always, is met if the petitioner is on probation, parole, or supervised release. Detention at a jail or prison also constitutes being “in custody” for purposes of § 2241.

***Am I required to exhaust alternative remedies before filing my habeas petition?***

A petitioner generally must exhaust alternative remedies before filing a habeas petition. For federal prisoners, they may mean first presenting your claims to the Federal Bureau of Prisons through its official grievance procedures. Failure to exhaust available alternative remedies may result in denial of your habeas petition.

***What type of relief is available if a petition is granted?***

A habeas petition is appropriate for challenging the fact that you are in custody, or for challenging the length of time for which you have been committed to custody. If your habeas petition is granted, your term in custody will be invalidated to the extent that the custody is found to be unlawful. Monetary damages, however, are not available in a habeas corpus action.



### *Can I amend my habeas petition after I file it?*

Maybe. If you want to amend your petition, you will need to file a motion to amend following the procedures for amendments found in Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 15(a).

### *What is a habeas petition “brought pursuant to § 2241”?*

Nearly all habeas petitions filed in federal court are governed by 28 U.S.C. § 2241, because § 2241 is the statute that permits federal courts to grant habeas petitions. Some habeas petitions are also governed by other statutes. For example, if you are a state prisoner looking for relief from a state-court judgment, your habeas petition will also be governed by 28 U.S.C. § 2254. These kinds of petitions are also brought pursuant to § 2241 but are often referred to as “Section 2254 petitions” because of the additional restrictions placed on those petitions by § 2254. **Much of the information in this Guidebook is not necessarily applicable to petitions governed by § 2254. For additional guidance, please see this Court’s Guidebook for Petitions for Writs of Habeas Corpus Governed by 28 U.S.C. § 2254.**

Habeas petitions that are not subject to § 2254 are often said to be “brought pursuant to § 2241,” or may be referred to as “§ 2241 petitions.” This Guidebook is intended specifically to discuss habeas petitions that are not governed by § 2254. Some examples include:

- Habeas petitions brought by a federal prisoner who believes that the BOP has miscalculated his sentence, wrongfully withheld “good-time credits,” or is otherwise unlawfully delaying the prisoner’s proper release date.



- Habeas petitions brought by individuals detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement challenging the legality of that detention.
- Habeas petitions brought by individuals in state pre-trial custody.

A federal prisoner seeking to challenge the legality of their conviction or sentence generally may not do so through a habeas petition and must instead seek relief through a motion filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255 in their criminal case. For additional guidance, please see this Court's Guidebook for Motions Filed under 28 U.S.C. § 2255.



## CHAPTER THREE: STARTING A § 2241 PROCEEDING

### *How do I start a § 2241 proceeding?*

To start a § 2241 proceeding in the Western District of Arkansas, you must do the following:

- Complete the habeas petition itself, by using the Court's form "Petition for a Writ of Habeas Corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241." You may also submit any exhibits you believe to be relevant.
- Complete a civil cover sheet (if available).
- Pay the \$5.00 filing fee or, if you cannot pay the fee, complete an application to proceed *in forma pauperis*; and
- Mail the documents and fee to the Clerk's Office at one of the addresses provided above.

Keep a copy of the habeas petition and all other documents filed with the Court for your own records.

### *How do I write a petition for a writ of habeas corpus?*

Your habeas petition, and all other documents prepared by you for the Court, should be typed or legibly handwritten, preferably in black ink. The petition should specify all the grounds for relief that you believe to be available to you, the facts supporting each ground, and the relief that you are requesting.

Available on the Western District of Arkansas's website, is a standard form for habeas petitions governed by § 2241. Pursuant to Rule 9.1 of the Local Rules for the Eastern and Western Districts of Arkansas you are required to use the Court's standard form. The document will assist you in providing the information needed for your



petition. Failure to include the necessary information could result in delay or dismissal of your habeas proceedings.

***Whom should I name as the respondent on the habeas corpus petition?***

The proper respondent in a habeas proceeding is usually the warden or the custodian of the facility where you are held.

***How should I identify the facts supporting my claims?***

You are required to identify in your habeas petition the facts supporting your claims. This description of the facts need not be long or detailed, but the petition should provide enough information that both the Court and the respondent can understand why you believe that you are entitled to relief. Each claim should include a separate recitation of facts supporting that claim for relief.

***May I file attachments with my petition?***

If you have documents that support your petition, you may attach copies of the documents to the petition as exhibits. The purpose of an exhibit is to present proof or clarification of an allegation in your petition. If you decide to attach exhibits to your petition, then you should explain or otherwise make clear why you are attaching each exhibit to the petition. You should label each separate exhibit and, if possible, number the pages of each exhibit. That said, you are not required to submit exhibits in support of your petition unless ordered to do so by the Court.



### ***May I file a memorandum of law with my petition?***

Yes. A memorandum of law, sometimes called a brief, is a document in which you explain your legal arguments supporting the claims raised in your petition. Litigants who are not represented by an attorney may write a memorandum legibly by hand or type a memorandum on standard paper. The memorandum should include page numbers. You are not required to submit a memorandum supporting your habeas petition, but doing so may help the Court understand why you believe you are entitled to relief.

### ***Do I need to notarize the petition?***

No, notarization of court documents is almost always unnecessary. That said, if you are not represented by an attorney, you are required to sign all documents (except exhibits) that you file with the Court, including your habeas petition. By signing a document, you are attesting that the statements in your document are true to the best of your knowledge. Knowingly making a false material declaration under oath can be punished by fine or imprisonment.

### ***What is a civil cover sheet?***

The civil cover sheet is a form provided by the Clerk's Office and is used to gather information about the nature of your lawsuit. You should file a civil cover sheet when you file your petition. The civil cover sheet is available on the Court's website or can be obtained from any of the Clerk's offices.



### ***How do I pay the filing fee?***

The Court charges a \$5.00 filing fee to begin a new habeas proceeding. The Court will accept payment by check or money order. Checks and money orders should be made payable to the “Clerk of Court.”

### ***What if I cannot afford the filing fee?***

If you cannot afford the \$5.00 filing fee, you must file an *in forma pauperis* (“IFP”) application. By completing an IFP application, you represent to the Court that payment of the filing fee would either be impossible or would amount to a substantial hardship. Provide the information requested on the application to the best of your ability. If the Court agrees that you are unable to pay the filing fee, you will be excused from that requirement. The application is available on the Court’s website or can be obtained from any of the Clerk’s offices.

### ***Do I need to serve a copy of my petition?***

No. You do not need to serve the respondent a copy of your petition. The respondent will be notified of your petition when it is received and filed by the Court.

### ***May I request appointment of counsel?***

Yes. Be aware, though, that there is no statutory or constitutional right to counsel in habeas corpus proceedings. If you file a motion to appoint counsel, you should explain the reasons that you believe appointment of counsel is necessary or appropriate in your



case. A form motion for appointment of counsel may be found on the Court's website or can be obtained from any of the Clerk's offices.

*How can I find out when my petition was received by the Clerk's Office?*

You may request in writing that the Clerk notify you when your petition was received and filed.





## CHAPTER FOUR: INITIAL REVIEW

### *What is initial review?*

Your habeas petition and IFP application (if one is submitted) will be reviewed by a judge or magistrate judge upon filing. The judge will dismiss the petition if it is clear that you are not entitled to relief. This initial review process may take several weeks.

### *How will I know the results of the initial review?*

If your petition is permitted to go forward, an order will be entered requiring the respondent to answer the petition. If your petition is deficient, either an order of dismissal or a Report and Recommendation recommending dismissal will be entered. You will receive a copy of any order or Report and Recommendation entered during the habeas proceedings.



## CHAPTER FIVE: THE HABEAS PROCEEDINGS

### *Will the government respond to the motion?*

If the petition is not summarily denied at initial review, the Court will order the respondent to file an answer to the petition within a specific amount of time. The respondent may, however, request additional time in which to file an answer if more time is needed.

### *May I reply to the respondent's answer?*

Yes. Sometimes the Court will order the filing of a reply brief. If it has not, you may file a motion informing the Court you would like to file a reply brief. You should do this as soon as possible after the response has been filed. If your motion is granted, the Court's order will set a deadline for the filing of your reply brief. You may request additional time in which to file a reply if more time is needed, but any request for more time should include an explanation as to why you will be unable to prepare your reply in the time initially allotted by the Court.

### *Is discovery allowed?*

Sometimes, but you must request permission from the Court before conducting discovery. Habeas petitions are usually resolved without formal discovery.



***Will there be an evidentiary hearing?***

Maybe, but the written record usually is enough for the Court to resolve the petition. Generally, only where this record proves inadequate will a hearing for admitting additional evidence be held.

***Will there be a hearing before the judge decides my case?***

Perhaps. Whether further oral argument of the parties is necessary in a case for further development of legal arguments is left to the judges presiding over that case.

***How do I object to an adverse Report and Recommendation?***

If a magistrate judge issues a Report and Recommendation in your case and you disagree with the recommendation, Local Rule 72.1(C) provides that you have 14 days to file objections. Your objections will be reviewed by the district judge assigned to the case. Your objections to the Report and Recommendation must be specific and relate to the magistrate judge's proposed findings and recommendations; new arguments are not permitted at this stage. Upon receiving your objections, the district judge assigned to the case will review the record and make a decision.

**Report and Recommendations are only filed in cases in which the parties have not consented to the jurisdiction of the magistrate.**



## CHAPTER SIX: JUDGMENT AND APPEAL

### *What do I need to do to file an appeal?*

Judgment will be entered after your case has become final. You will receive a copy of the judgment after it is entered, along with instructions on how to pursue an appeal with the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. An appeal may only be made after judgment has been entered in your case. The time for filing an appeal starts from the date that the judgment is entered on the docket.

### *How do I file an appeal?*

First, you must file a notice of appeal. A form notice of appeal may be found on the Court's website or obtained from any of the Clerk's offices. Second, you must pay the \$605.00 filing fee for the appeal. If you are not able to pay the \$605.00 appellate filing fee, then you may apply for IFP status on appeal. Any application to proceed IFP on appeal should, like the notice of appeal, be filed in the district court. If your application is granted, then you will not be required to pay the \$605.00 filing fee. If the district judge denies your motion to proceed IFP on appeal, then you may then request IFP status from the Eighth Circuit.

### *How much time do I have to begin my appeal?*

You must file your notice of appeal in this Court within 60 days after the judgment is entered if the respondent is an officer or employee of the United States; **otherwise, you must file your notice of appeal within 30 days.** For additional information regarding the



time for filing a notice of appeal, review Rule 4(a) of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure.

***May I request appointment of counsel on appeal?***

Yes, but your request should be filed with the Eighth Circuit. Be warned that there is no statutory or constitutional right to counsel on appeal in habeas corpus proceedings.

