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SC SUPREME COURT

BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT ("S Ct") OF SOUTH CAROLINA ("SC")

Appellate Case No. 2023-00----

AND STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF RICHLAND

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COMMON PLEAS  
On Application for Post-Conviction Relief (PCR) No. 2019-CP-40-02219

Marie Assa'ad-Faltas, MD, MPH

**Applicant/Appellant's Timely NOTICE of Appeal**

v.

State of South Carolina, and City of Columbia, SC

Marie Assa'ad-Faltas, MD, MPH ("Dr. Assa'ad-Faltas" or "Dr. Faltas"), having for all intents and purposes been abandoned by her forced counsel Timothy Lee Griffith ("Griffith"), who since 16 November 2022 failed to take any adequate action to protect Dr. Assa'ad-Faltas' rights and interests, and having on Saturday, 25 February 2023, received the ORDER OF DISMISSAL of the above-captioned case, as evidenced by the attached copy of the envelope from the Richland County Clerk of Court and by Dr. Assa'ad-Faltas' within declaration under penalty of perjury that she had *at least daily* been scanning the public index of her pending cases but did not see that signed and filed ORDER OF DISMISSAL until the afternoon of 21 February 2023, and then only after having e-mailed Griffith and South Carolina's Commission on Indigent Defense ("SCCOID") an inquiry on whether Griffith had sent SC Circuit Judge D. Craig Brown ("JDCB") any objections to the State's draft orders, **hereby gives timely notice of appeal from the ORDER OF DISMISSAL in the above action as said ORDER directs Dr. Assa'ad-Faltas to file said appeal** and this Court's 27 September 2017 ORDER, regardless of its contested validity, allows Dr. Assa'ad-Faltas to file a *pro se* notice of appeal and as any sentence imposed by this Court's 10 June 2022 ORDER in SC Case 2022-000815 had a six-month limit and has by now been fully served. **Should this Court disagree, it is hereby asked to issue fair clarification.**

Certificate of Submission AND Certificate of Service AND of Copies

Submitted and served by hand-delivery to SC Attorney General's ("SCAG") office at 1000 Assembly Street Columbia, SC 29201, and by hand-delivery to Richland County's Clerk of Court at 1701 Main Street Columbia, SC 29201, and *courtesy-copied* to: Griffith at [tlgriffith@tlgriffith.com](mailto:tlgriffith@tlgriffith.com), and to SCCOID at [hyoung@sccid.sc.gov](mailto:hyoung@sccid.sc.gov), and [hryan@sccid.sc.gov](mailto:hryan@sccid.sc.gov), and relevant others, all **on 3 March 2023**, and all God so willing.

S/Marie-Thérèse Assa'ad-Faltas, MD, MPH, Applicant-Appellant  
P.O. Box 9115, Columbia, SC 29290 e-mail: [Marie\\_Faltas@hotmail.com](mailto:Marie_Faltas@hotmail.com)  
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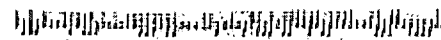
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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA )  
 COUNTY OF RICHLAND )  
 )  
 Marie Assa'ad-Faltas, )  
 )  
 Applicant, )  
 )  
 v. )  
 State of South Carolina, )  
 )  
 Respondent. )

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS  
 FOR THE FIFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

Case No.: 2019-CP-40-2219

**ORDER OF DISMISSAL**

JENNIFER V. COOPER  
 C.C.P. G.S. § 1-210  
 2023 FEB - 8 PM 12: 09  
 RICHLAND COUNTY  
 FILED

This matter is before the Court by way of an application for post-conviction relief (PCR) filed by Marie Assa'ad-Faltas (Applicant) on April 22, 2019. Respondent filed a return moving to dismiss this application pursuant to the statute of limitations. On November 17, 2022, an evidentiary hearing convened before the Honorable D. Craig Brown. Applicant was represented by Timothy L. Griffith, Esquire. Assistant Attorney General Danielle Dixon represented Respondent. Despite being notified by this Court on November 2, 2022, that she would be required to appear in-person at this hearing, Applicant did not attend. In her absence, Mr. Griffith did not have any witnesses to call or any other evidence to present. Based on Applicant's failure to attend and submit any evidence or testimony to support the allegations in her application, I find she has failed to meet her burden of proof. Additionally, I find this action is barred by the statute of limitations. Thus, this Court denies relief and dismisses this application with prejudice.

**Procedural History**

This PCR application arises from an order finding Applicant in contempt of court. On October 6, 2010, the Honorable Marion O. Hanna held a motion hearing in the City of Columbia Municipal Court on several actions involving Applicant. During the hearing, Judge Hanna found

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Applicant in contempt of court. Judge Hanna sentenced Applicant to ten days in jail or a \$50 fine.<sup>1</sup>

On October 14, 2010, Applicant filed a *pro se* notice of appeal in the circuit court (2010-CP-40-7063). Thereafter, on April 8, 2011, the South Carolina Supreme Court issued an order prohibiting Applicant from filing *pro se* actions in South Carolina courts.<sup>2</sup> Applicant's appeal was set for a hearing on September 16, 2011, and Applicant appeared *pro se*. Due to the South Carolina Supreme Court's order prohibiting Applicant from proceeding *pro se*, the circuit court granted Applicant an additional thirty days to obtain counsel before ruling on her appeal. On November 1, 2011, the circuit court issued an order dismissing Applicant's appeal for failure to prosecute.

On December 1, 2011, Applicant attempted to file a notice of appeal in the South Carolina Supreme Court. The following day, the Clerk of the South Carolina Supreme Court notified Applicant by letter that her appeal had not been accepted due to the prohibitions of the Supreme Court's April 8, 2011 order.<sup>3,4</sup>

On July 11, 2013—more than twenty months after the circuit court dismissed her circuit court appeal and more than nineteen months after the South Carolina Supreme Court rejected her notice of appeal—Applicant filed a motion requesting appointment of counsel to perfect her appeal of the circuit court's denial of relief. On November 8, 2017, the circuit court issued an order denying Applicant's motion for appointment of counsel. Applicant filed a motion for partial reconsideration on November 9, 2017; that motion was denied on December 23, 2020. Applicant

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<sup>1</sup> Applicant's application indicates Applicant has paid this fine.

<sup>2</sup> Applicant appealed that order to the United States Supreme Court, which denied her petition for writ of certiorari on November 14, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Applicant "resubmitted" her notice of appeal on January 3, 2014. By letter dated February 21, 2014, the Clerk notified Applicant that her resubmitted notice of appeal would not be accepted.

<sup>4</sup> On August 6, 2012, Applicant filed a petition for writ of habeas corpus in the Federal District Court seeking relief from this contempt proceeding. The District Court dismissed her habeas petition without prejudice on September 11, 2012, and the Fourth Circuit declined to issue a certificate of appealability on June 6, 2013.

DCB  
p. 2 of 11

appealed that order to the South Carolina Supreme Court (2021-000047); the appeal was dismissed on August 31, 2022, and the remittitur was sent October 13, 2022.

### Current Application

Applicant filed the current application for PCR on April 22, 2019, alleging her conviction was obtained in violation of her constitutional rights and she continues to suffer the consequences of the conviction for the following reasons:

1. "Complete denial of appellate counsel"
  - a. "When I appeared before Judge Barber on 16 September 2011, I advised him (and he so documented in 22 September 2011 ORDER) that I had contacted at least four private lawyers to represent me but they refused due to my inability to pay them. Judge Barber knew of my entitlement to state-appointed appellate counsel but did not even offer me one. That prejudiced me because at the time, I was not allowed to advocate pro se at all but I had many meritorious appeal issues, all of which I had preserved at CMC (which has no civil jurisdiction) and in my appellate pleadings filed before I was denied self-representation. I could have won my appeal if heard on its merits."
2. "Per Robinson v. California, 370 U.S. 660, 667 (1962), criminalization of my legal and constitutionally-protected conduct violates the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Eighth Amendment was made applicable to the states by the U.S. Supreme Court in Timbs v. Indiana, 586 U.S. \_\_\_ (decided 20 February 2019). This PCR is timely filed within one year of the Timbs decision per § 17-24-45(B), SC Code of Laws."
  - a. "Zealous but polite examination of an adverse witness cannot be a crime. Marion violated Amendment XIII by holding me in contempt in this context of the 6 October 2010 hearing . . . CMC-made audio recording of the entire 6 October 2010 CMC court day is also available and proves that I was speaking politely and observing decorum throughout the day."
3. "After-discovered evidence of actual innocence. This PCR is timely filed within one year of the most recent discovery of evidence per § 17-24-25(B), SC Code of laws."
  - a. "Marion wrote and self-published a second so-called novel which betrays her morbid hatred of all people, particularly females smarter and prettier than Marion, and her fantasies to shoot females and/or cause them to be 'locked up' in psychiatric hospitals. Marion offered to waive my fine if I submitted to psychiatric examination. Review of other transcripts and of her treatment of

PCB  
p. 3 of 11

her own mother-in-law establishes that fixation and proves that Marion held me in contempt to extort me to undergo psychiatric examination, all to satisfy her own degraded sadistic lusts, not because I did anything even remotely resembling contempt.”

4. “Through no fault of mine, the transcript of 16 September 2011 hearing before SC Circuit Court Judge Barber was lost or destroyed. I have a constitutional right to said transcript under Chessman v. Teets, 350 U.S. 3 (1955).”

a. “In May-August 2016, I duly contacted SC Court Administration to obtain the transcript of the 16 September 2011 hearing, which must be kept for five years; but I received in writing confirmation that the court reporter (Ms. L. Coconut Pantsari) who was assigned to that court that day cannot find her recording of the transcript of my hearing.”

Before this Court are the filings of this current action, including the application, Respondent’s return and motion to dismiss, Applicant’s reply to Respondent’s return and motion to dismiss, and Respondent’s amended return and motion to dismiss; the transcript of the contempt hearing before Judge Hanna; the records from the circuit court appeal (2010-CP-40-7063) and subsequent appeal to the Supreme Court of South Carolina (2021-000047); prior orders from the Supreme Court of South Carolina restricting Applicant’s ability to proceed pro se (Order dated Sept. 20, 2019 in 2019-000036; Order dated Sept. 27, 2017 in 2013-000862; Order dated Jan. 30, 2014 in 2013-000862; Order dated Apr. 8, 2011 in *The City of Columbia, Respondent, v. Marie Assa’ad-Faltas, MD, MPH, Appellant*); and prior orders from this Court regarding restrictions on Applicant’s contact with the judicial branch and her ability to proceed pro se (*Order Restricting Applicant’s Ability to Make Pro Se Filings and Directing the Richland County Clerk of Court to Refuse any Filings From Dr. Faltas Unless They are Filed on Her Behalf by Counsel of Record*, filed July 12, 2021; and *Global Order Re-emphasizing that Dr. Faltas is NOT to Communicate with Any Member of the Judicial Branch, Its Employees or Staff, and Outlining Contempt Proceedings Should She Continue To Do So*, filed July 12, 2021).

DCB  
p. 4 of 11

### The Evidentiary Hearing

Prior to the hearing, Applicant requested to attend via WebEx. Respondent objected, and this Court informed Applicant by email that she would be required to appear in person unless she provided additional information about her health condition. Thereafter, Applicant emailed the parties a graph of what appears to be a diagnostic test. See Court's Ex. 1. However, Applicant did not send any statement from a treating physician interpreting the graph or otherwise relaying that Applicant could not attend the hearing due to health reasons. On November 2, 2022, the undersigned's law clerk emailed the following to Applicant's counsel: "Judge Brown has reviewed the document submitted by Dr. Faltas, however, without medical documentation stating that she is unable to physically attend, she will still be required to appear in person for her PCR hearings." See Court's Ex. 1. This Court did not receive any further documentation prior to this hearing related to Applicant's health. Thus, her request to appear via WebEx was denied.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the hearing, counsel for Applicant relayed to the Court that Applicant did not intend to attend the hearing.<sup>6</sup> Counsel moved for a continuance, which this Court denied.<sup>7</sup> Respondent renewed its motion to dismiss based on the statute of limitations. Respondent also

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<sup>5</sup> This Court also denied the State's request to have an out-of-state witness appear via WebEx.

<sup>6</sup> Applicant likewise did not attend her other PCR hearing scheduled for November 17, 2022 (2019-CP-40-2218) or either of her PCR hearings scheduled for November 16, 2022 (2019-CP-40-112, -2217). She did, however, attend the November 18, 2022 hearing in Austin Woods Apartments v. Marie Assa'ad-Faltas, MD, MPH (2018-CP-40-963), in which she was permitted to proceed pro se. The Undersigned, who was vested with exclusive jurisdiction of all these cases pursuant to a September 15, 2020 order issued by the Supreme Court of South Carolina, finds Applicant did not have an apparent health condition that prevented her from attending court on November 18, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> During this hearing, Applicant sent an email to the Office of the Attorney General again asserting she had health conditions that prevented her from attending. This Court reviewed the email and determined it did not contain any documentation from a treating physician indicating Applicant was unable to attend due to health reasons. See Court's Ex. 2. This Court set aside three of the five days of this PCR term of Court for matters involving Applicant, and Applicant has not set forth a valid basis for not attending. Thus, this Court declines to continue these cases.

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moved to dismiss the case based on Applicant's failure to appear and present evidence and testimony to support her allegations. For the reasons set forth below, this Court granted Respondent's motion to dismiss.

### **Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law**

This Court has had the opportunity to review the proceedings from the municipal action and all related cases and appeals. After a careful review, this Court finds this application shall be dismissed. Below are this Court's findings of facts and conclusions of law as required by section 17-27-80 of the South Carolina Code (2017).

### ***Statute of Limitations***

This Court finds Applicant failed to comply with the filing procedures of the PCR Act. S.C. Code Ann. § 17-27-10 to -160. Specifically, the Act requires:

An application for relief filed pursuant to this chapter must be filed within one year after the entry of a judgment of conviction or within one year after the sending of the remittitur to the lower court from an appeal or the filing of the final decision on appeal, whichever is later.

S.C. Code Ann. § 17-27-45(A).

The statute of limitations applies to all applications filed after July 1, 1996. Peloquin v. State, 321 S.C. 468, 469 S.E.2d 606 (1996). A motion for summary judgment may properly be used to raise the defense of statute of limitations. McDonnell v. Consolidated School District of Aiken, 315 S.C. 487, 445 S.E.2d 638 (1994).

Here, Applicant was held in contempt on October 6, 2010. Her appeal in the circuit court was denied on November 1, 2011, and her appeal in the South Carolina Supreme court was rejected on December 2, 2011. This application was therefore due to be filed on or before December 3,

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2012. The application was instead filed on April 22, 2019 – more than six years beyond the statute of limitations.

In her application, Applicant attempted to excuse her lack of compliance with the statute of limitations by claiming the February 20, 2019 United States Supreme Court's (USSC) decision in Timbs v. Indiana<sup>8</sup> gave rise to a new ground pursuant to the Eighth Amendment. Applicant argues that because she filed this application within one year of that decision, she has complied with the statute of limitations. However, Timbs is inapplicable to Applicant's case. Further, Timbs did not announce a new rule of law and is therefore not retroactive. Accordingly, Applicant cannot rely on Timbs to excuse her failure to comply with the statute of limitations.

In Timbs, the defendant pled guilty in Indiana state court to drug charges and conspiracy to commit theft. At the time of his arrest, law enforcement seized Timbs's Land Rover valued at \$42,000. After his conviction, the State of Indiana commenced a forfeiture action for the Land Rover. The trial court denied Indiana's demand, finding it violated the Eighth Amendment's Excessive Fines Clause because the Land Rover's \$42,000 value was grossly disproportionate to the maximum fine imposed for Timbs's conviction—\$10,000. The Indiana Supreme Court reversed, holding the Eighth Amendment applied only to federal action, not state action.

The USSC reversed the Indiana high court's decision, holding the Eighth Amendment was incorporated to the states through the Due Process Clause. In doing so, the USSC laid out the long history of protection against excessive fines, both federally and by the individual states. The Timbs decision did not announce a new rule or change the law; it was issued simply to clarify the long-existing interpretation and was necessary only because the Indiana Supreme Court's decision was clearly erroneous. Additionally, in this case, Applicant was sentenced to ten days in jail or a

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<sup>8</sup> 586 U.S. \_\_\_, 139 S.Ct. 682 (2019).

DCB  
P 7/7/11

\$50 fine, which on its face is not excessive, nor has Applicant alleged it was outside of the statutorily-allowed amount. The amount at issue in Timbs was four times more than the maximum imposed by the statute, and it was a civil forfeiture pursued in addition to a criminal penalty. Thus, Applicant's case and Timbs are easily distinguishable. Regardless, because Timbs did not announce a new substantive rule of law, it is not applicable to collateral actions retroactively. See Montgomery v. Louisiana, 577 U.S. 190 (2016) (holding state collateral review courts must give retroactive effect only when a decision announces a new substantive rule of constitutional law).

Finally, regardless of the applicability of Timbs, the South Carolina Constitution contains an identical prohibition, stating “[e]xcessive bail shall not be required, nor shall excessive fines be imposed, nor shall cruel, nor corporal, nor unusual punishment be inflicted. . . .” S.C. Const. Art. 1, § 15. This clause has been in effect since at least 1970 and was in effect at the time of Applicant's contempt conviction. Thus, Applicant could have raised an excessive-fines argument within one year of the denial of her attempted appeal. This Court thus finds Timbs does not offer a valid basis for tolling the statute of limitations.

At the hearing, counsel for Applicant asserted the statute of limitations should be tolled because Applicant was prevented from filing a PCR application “for quite some time.” This Court finds this contention without merit. Although this Court acknowledges the South Carolina Supreme Court has issued various orders restricting Applicant's ability to proceed pro se, those orders did not prohibit her from filing a PCR application pro se. In fact, this application was filed by Applicant pro se.<sup>9</sup> Applicant has not set forth a valid reason she was prohibited from filing this PCR application, and she cannot in good faith argue that she was prohibited from filing it *pro se*

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<sup>9</sup> Further, as recent as 2018, Applicant argued in court that the orders restricting her ability to proceed pro se did not apply to PCR actions. That very issue was clarified by the South Carolina Supreme Court on September 20, 2019—*after* Applicant filed this PCR application *pro se*!

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when she did in fact file it *pro se*. Because Applicant has not offered any valid reason for her failure to comply with the statute of limitations, this application is barred by the statute of limitations.<sup>10</sup>

### *Ineffective Assistance of Counsel*

In a PCR action, **an applicant bears the burden of proving the allegations.** Rule 71.1(e), SCRPC; Butler v. State, 286 S.C. 441, 334 S.E.2d 813 (1985). An applicant alleging ineffective assistance of counsel must prove “counsel’s conduct so undermined the proper functioning of the adversarial process that the trial cannot be relied upon as having produced a just result.” Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984); Butler, 286 S.C. at 441, 334 S.E.2d at 813. “The test for effective assistance of counsel is whether the representation was within the range of competence demanded of attorneys in criminal cases.” Watson v. State, 287 S.C. 356, 357, 338 S.E.2d 636, 637 (1985). Courts presume counsel rendered adequate assistance and made all significant decisions in the exercise of reasonable professional judgment. Butler, 286 S.C. at 441, 334 S.E.2d at 813. An applicant must overcome this presumption to received relief. Cherry v. State, 300 S.C. 115, 386 S.E.2d 624 (1989).

To establish ineffective assistance of counsel, a PCR applicant must prove (1) counsel’s performance fell below an objective standard of reasonableness and (2) the applicant sustained prejudice due to counsel’s deficient performance. Strickland, 466 U.S. at 687–88; Cherry, 300

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<sup>10</sup> This Court finds Applicant’s claim of after-discovered evidence—based on a book purportedly written by Judge Hanna—does not set forth a prima facie claim for after-discovered evidence; thus, it is summarily dismissed. See Hayden v. State, 278 S.C. 610, 611-12, 299 S.E.2d 854, 855 (1983) (providing a defendant requesting a new trial based on after-discovered evidence must show the evidence (1) is such as would probably change the result if a new trial was held; (2) has been discovered since the trial; (3) could not, by the exercise of due diligence, have been discovered before trial; (4) is material to the issue of guilt or innocence; and (5) is not merely cumulative or impeaching).

PCB  
p. 9 of 11

S.C. at 117-18, 386 S.E.2d at 625.

Applicant did not present any evidence or testimony to support her PCR allegations. Applicant was informed that she would be required to attend in-person well in advance of the hearing and never offered documentation from a treating physician of her inability to attend. This Court finds Applicant failed to establish good cause for her failure to attend. In Applicant's absence, counsel for Applicant did not have a witness to testify and present evidence to support the allegations in the PCR application. Thus, Applicant failed to meet her burden of proof, and this Application is denied and dismissed with prejudice.

[Conclusion and Signature Page Follows]

DCB  
p. 10 of 11

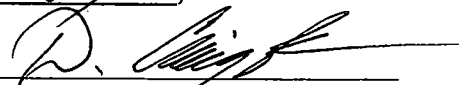
**Conclusion**

Based on the foregoing, this Court finds and concludes this application is barred by the statute of limitations. This Court further finds and concludes that Applicant has not established any constitutional violations or deprivations that would require this Court to grant relief. Thus, this application is denied and dismissed with prejudice.

Should Applicant wish to secure appellate review, she must file and serve a notice of appeal within thirty days of receipt by counsel of written notice of entry of judgment. See Rule 203, SCACR. Pursuant to Austin v. State, 305 S.C. 453, 409 S.E.2d 395 (1991), an applicant has the right to an appellate counsel's assistance in seeking review of the denial of PCR. Pursuant to Rule 71.1(g), SCRCF, if an applicant wishes to seek appellate review, PCR counsel must serve and file a notice of appeal on applicant's behalf. Attention is directed to Rule 243, SCACR, for appropriate procedures for appeal.

**IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that this application for PCR is denied and dismissed with prejudice.

**AND IT IS SO ORDERED THIS** 1<sup>st</sup> day of February, 2023.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
D. CRAIG BROWN  
Presiding Judge  
Fifth Judicial Circuit

Florence, South Carolina

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