

Clerk of Court
P. O. Box 11629
Columbia SC 29211

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July 11, 2019

JUL 18 2019

Re: 2018-001555

SC Court of Appeals

Dear Mrs. Allen:

I am in receipt of your letter of June 25, 2019 regarding my attempt to file an appropriate "Record on Appeal." In previous letters to you, I tried to explain that it is very difficult to get copies made in prison [SCDC]. The staff will not make copies of policies or any documents without a court stamp on them. I was hoping the Respondents' documents/records would be sufficient, or at least they have the means to produce the "Record on Appeal." I can not get a copy of Policy OP 21-04 Inmate Classification, but I will try to get a copy of the May 22, 2018 Order of Dismissal.

I do not have Rule 210, but I do have Rule 61 & 58, which lists 6 items (A thru F) to be included in the record. I believe the records that the Respondents submitted to the ALC in 2018 have all the necessary documents, except the May 22, 2018 Order and Policy OP 21-04.

If there is anything you are requesting from me, please include a letter from your office requesting SCDC staff to make copies.

July 11, 2019

encl. May 22, 2018 Order

Annie Laurie Rumber
4444 B.R.R.
Columbia SC 29221

Attorney for Respondent

Frank M. Baster

Frank M. Baster, 153004
Evans CI Cherokee 217c
610 Hwy 9 West
Bennettsville SC 29512

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
ADMINISTRATIVE LAW COURT

Frank Mitchell Gaster, #153004,)
)
Appellant,)
)
vs.)
)
South Carolina Department of Corrections,)
)
Respondent.)
_____)

Docket No. 18-ALJ-04-0016-AP

ORDER OF DISMISSAL

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SC Court of Appeals

This matter comes before the South Carolina Administrative Law Court (court) pursuant to the South Carolina Department of Corrections' (Department) motion to dismiss the appeal of Frank Gaster (Appellant), an inmate incarcerated with the Department. After the Appellant's Step 1 and Step 2 grievances were filed and denied, he filed a Notice of Appeal with this court on January 17, 2018. The Appellant is challenging the Department's classification policy and claims that the Department is applying their policy unconstitutionally by assigning him an increased classification level based solely on a 1988 prior conviction.

The Record on Appeal was filed on March 28, 2018 thereby making the Appellant's brief due on or before April 25, 2018. On May 2, 2018, the Department filed a Motion to Dismiss because the Appellant had not submitted his brief and because the Appellant's appeal does not implicate a state-created liberty or property interest in accordance with *Slezak v. S.C. Dep't of Corr.*, 361 S.C. 327, 605 S.E.2d 506 (2004). However, the Appellant filed his brief on May 9, 2018, stating that his brief was late due to a lockdown of his correctional institution after deadly prison riots.

DISCUSSION

The court's jurisdiction to hear this matter is derived entirely from the decision of the South Carolina Supreme Court in *Al-Shabazz v. State*, 338 S.C. 354, 527 S.E.2d 742 (2000). The court's appellate jurisdiction in inmate appeals is limited to cases involving denial of state created liberty interests, typically involving: (1) cases in which an inmate contends that prison officials have erroneously calculated his sentence, sentence-related credits, or custody status; and (2) cases in

¹ The Court does have limited jurisdiction in some property matters, the authority for which need not be cited here.

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SC ADMIN. LAW COURT

which an inmate has received punishment in a major disciplinary hearing as a result of a serious rule violation. Id.

The Supreme Court further explained the court's jurisdiction in Slezak v. South Carolina Department of Corrections, 361 S.C. 327, 605 S.E.2d 506 (2004). "Summary dismissal may be appropriate where the inmate's grievance does not implicate a state-created liberty or property interest." Id. citing Sandin v. Conner, 515 U.S. 472, 115 S.Ct. 2293 (1995). Additionally, the South Carolina Court of Appeals has opined that where a state-created liberty interest is not implicated in a prisoner appeal, this court should dismiss the appeal. Skipper v. S.C. Department of Corrections, 370 S.C. 267, 633 S.E. 2d 910 (Ct. App. 2006). In the present case, the Appellant has failed to allege a deprivation of a state-created liberty or property interest. The South Carolina Supreme Court noted in Brown v. Evatt, that "[t]he federal constitution vests no liberty interest in inmates in retaining or receiving any particular security or custody status as long as the challenged conditions or degree of confinement are within the sentence imposed and are not otherwise violative of the Constitution." 322 S.C. 189, 194, 470 S.E.2d 848, 851 (1996) (citing Sandin v. Conner, 515 U.S. 472 (1995)). Though the Court acknowledged that state law placing "substantive limitations on official discretion" could create such a liberty interest in a particular security or custody classification, the Court added:

[E]ven if a state law regime mandates both a detailed procedural process for making classification decisions and substantive criteria to be used in making those decisions, no constitutionally protected liberty interest is created if under the regime either the primary decisionmaker or any reviewing authority is authorized to override, as a matter of discretion, any classification suggested by application of the prescribed substantive criteria.

Id. at 194-95, 470 S.E.2d at 851 (citing Slezak v. Evatt 21 F.3d 590 (4th Cir.1994), *cert. denied* 513 U.S. 889 (1994)). The Court then concluded:

Neither the state statutes which create and define the powers of the SCDC nor SCDC's operational classification regulations create the required liberty interest. Though they provide procedural safeguards and substantive criteria for making base-line classification decisions, these are made only as recommendations that are subject to discretionary review and rejection by higher-level prison officials.

Id. at 195, 470 S.E.2d at 851.

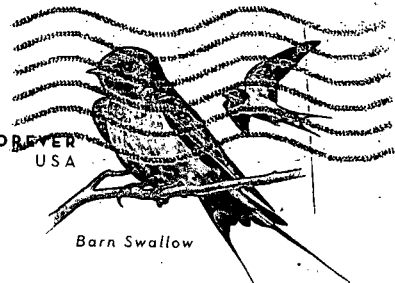
Here, because the Appellant is challenging his classification, and that decision is subject to discretionary review and rejection by higher-level prison officials, the Appellant has not alleged a state-created liberty interest. Although the Appellant did file a brief with the court and the court

Frank M. Gaster, 153004
Evans CE Cherokee 217C
610 Hwy 9 West
Bennettsville SC 29512

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