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INEFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE OF COUNSEL AND STATE MISCONDUCT

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I.

The two most common grounds raised in Applications for Writs of Habeas Corpus are ineffective assistance of counsel and prosecutorial misconduct by suppression of exculpatory evidence. This paper discusses these two grounds.

II.

INEFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE OF COUNSEL

Introduction

The right to be represented by counsel is by far the most important of a defendant's constitutional rights because it affects the ability of a defendant to assert a myriad of other rights. As Justice Sutherland explained in *Powell v. Alabama*, 287 U.S. 45, 68-69 (1932):

The right to be heard would be, in many cases, of little avail if it did not comprehend the right to be heard by counsel. Even the intelligent and educated layman has small and sometimes no skill in the science of law. If charged with a crime, he is incapable, generally, of determining for himself whether the indictment is good or bad. He is unfamiliar with the rules of evidence. Left without the aid of counsel he may be put on trial without a proper charge, and convicted upon incompetent evidence, or evidence irrelevant to the issue or otherwise inadmissible. He lacks both the skill and knowledge adequately to prepare his defense, even though he have a perfect one. He requires the guiding hand of counsel at every step in the proceedings against him. Without it, though he be not guilty, he faces the danger of conviction because he does not know how to establish his innocence. If that be true of men of intelligence, how much more true is it of the ignorant and illiterate, or those of feeble intellect. If in any case, civil or criminal, a state or federal court were arbitrarily to refuse to hear a party by counsel, employed by and appearing for him, it reasonably may not be doubted that such a refusal would be a denial of a hearing, and, therefore, of due process in the constitutional sense.

Id., at 68-69, 53 S.Ct., at 63-64.

The right to the assistance of counsel is guaranteed by the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and Article 1, Section 10 of the Texas Constitution. This right to the assistance of counsel has long been understood to include a “right to the effective assistance of counsel.” *See McMann v. Richardson*, 397 U.S. 759, 771, n. 14 (1970). The integrity of our criminal justice system and the fairness of the adversary criminal process is assured only if an accused is represented by an effective attorney. *See United States v. Morrison*, 449 U.S. 361, 364 (1981). Absent the effective assistance of counsel, “a serious risk of injustice infects the trial itself.” *Cuyler v. Sullivan*, 446 U.S. 335, 343 (1980). Thus, a defendant is constitutionally entitled to have effective counsel acting in the role of an advocate. *See Anders v. California*, 386 U.S. 738, 743 (1967).

The Legal Standard

The United States Supreme Court in *Strickland v. Washington*, 466 U.S. 668 (1984) established the federal standard for determining whether an attorney rendered reasonably effective assistance of counsel. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals in *Hernandez v. State*, 726 S.W.2d 53, 57 (Tex. Crim. App. 1986) adopted the *Strickland* test as the proper test under state law to gauge the effectiveness of counsel. Pursuant to that test

. . . the defendant must show that counsel’s performance was deficient. This requires showing that counsel made errors so serious that counsel was not functioning as the ‘counsel’ guaranteed the defendant by the Sixth Amendment. Second, the defendant must show that the deficient performance prejudiced the defense. This requires showing that counsel’s errors were so serious as to deprive the defendant of a fair trial, a trial

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