26-5184

No. ________________

FILED
MAR 13 2026
OFFICE OF THE CLERK
SUPREME COURT, U.S.

ORIGINAL

IN THE

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

MICHAEL BENTLEY III — **PETITIONER**

vs.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT AT GREENEVILLE — **RESPONDENT(S)**

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Michael Bentley III

Inmate No. 79409

Sullivan County Jail

P.O. Box 610

Blountville, TN 37617

Mailing Address for Correspondence:

Michael Bentley III

c/o MICHAEL WAYNE BENTLEY III© Trust

6316 Heatherwood Lane

Kingsport, Tennessee 37663

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. **Forced Withdrawal of Counsel, Restricted Self-Representation, and Imposition of Counsel**
   Whether the Sixth Amendment and Due Process Clause are violated where appointed counsel withdraws after refusing to present a defendant's jurisdictional and constitutional defenses, the defendant is forced to proceed pro se under threat of being left without counsel, the court then restricts the defendant from presenting those defenses or declines to adjudicate them, and appellate counsel is thereafter imposed while the defendant is barred from proceeding pro se or filing his own submissions.

2. **Court-Entered Plea Without Consent**
   Whether the Sixth Amendment and Due Process Clause are violated where a court enters a plea on behalf of a defendant who refuses to plead, without a knowing, voluntary, and intelligent waiver of rights, and before adjudicating the defendant's jurisdictional objections.

3. **Failure to Adjudicate Jurisdiction and Authority to Proceed**
   Whether due process is violated where a court proceeds to conviction and sentence without identifying the jurisdiction under which it acts or adjudicating objections challenging its authority, including challenges concerning the absence of an injured party, corpus delicti, or other jurisdictional basis.

4. **Refusal to Recognize and Adjudicate Trust and Party-in-Interest Filings**
   Whether the First and Fifth Amendments are violated where courts refuse to docket, recognize, or adjudicate duly submitted trust instruments, trustee-capacity filings, affidavits, notices, financing statements, and related documents identifying the real party in interest, and instead return, ignore, or mischaracterize such filings without ruling.

5. **Obstruction of Filings, Writs, and Record Development**
   Whether due process and the right of access to the courts are violated where filings are returned without docketing, including jurisdictional writs such as habeas corpus and quo warranto, where pro se submissions are refused, and where transcript access is obstructed, thereby preventing the creation of a meaningful record for appellate review.

6. **Failure to Decide Issues While Depriving Liberty**
   Whether the Fifth Amendment Due Process Clause is violated where a court deprives a person of liberty while refusing to adjudicate or provide reasoned rulings on dispositive issues, including jurisdictional objections, defense claims, and challenges to the court's authority.

7. **Exclusion of Critical Defense Evidence**
   Whether the Sixth Amendment and Due Process Clause are violated where a defendant is prevented from presenting expert testimony and other evidence concerning mental impairment, voluntariness, and diminished capacity central to the defense.

8. **Prosecutorial Misconduct and Argument Outside the Record**
   Whether the Due Process Clause is violated where the prosecution relies on testimony contradicted by physical evidence and investigative records, advances arguments not supported by the evidence, and expresses personal or speculative assertions of guilt, resulting in conviction based on argument rather than proof.

9. **Conviction Based on Contradicted Testimony and Absence of Objective Evidence**
   Whether due process is violated where conviction rests on testimony contradicted by physical evidence, investigative records, and the absence of required objective recordings, and where material inconsistencies are not resolved before verdict.

10. **Sentencing Based on Protected Conduct and Disproportionate Punishment**
    Whether the First, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments are violated where a sentencing court increases punishment based on a defendant's filings, asserted legal positions, jurisdictional objections, religious beliefs, or perceived views about government, and where such considerations result in a sentence grossly disproportionate to the actual conduct and record evidence.

11. **Structural Error and Fundamental Breakdown of Due Process**
    Whether the cumulative effect of forced or obstructed representation, court-entered plea, refusal to adjudicate jurisdictional objections, rejection of trust and party-in-interest filings, obstruction of jurisdictional writs including quo warranto, suppression of the record, exclusion of defense evidence, reliance on contradicted testimony, prosecutorial misconduct, and punishment based on protected conduct constitutes structural error requiring reversal.

LIST OF PARTIES

The parties to the proceeding in the court whose judgment is sought to be reviewed are:

Petitioner: MICHAEL BENTLEY III

Respondent: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

RELATED CASES

- United States v. Bentley, No. 2:22-cr-19, United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, Greeneville Division.
- United States v. Bentley, No. 24-5433, United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.
- State of Tennessee v. Michael Bentley, No. S75,796, Sullivan County Criminal Court.
- Sharla-Gay: Bentley, Trustee for the MICHAEL WAYNE BENTLEY III© Trust v. Greer, Goodwin, et al., No. 82CH1-2025-CV-19506, Sullivan County Chancery Court.
- Sharla-Gay Bentley, as Trustee for the MICHAEL WAYNE BENTLEY III© Trust v. James F. Goodwin, et al., No. E2026-00394-SC-WRM-CV, Supreme Court of Tennessee. Petition for Writ of Mandamus and Writ of Prohibition dismissed March 27, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX TO APPENDICES

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

STATUTES / CODES / RULES

CASES

IN THE

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Petitioner respectfully prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment below.

OPINIONS BELOW

[X] For cases from federal courts:

The opinion of the United States court of appeals appears at Appendix A to the petition and is

[ ] reported at ____________________; or,
[ ] has been designated for publication but is not yet reported; or,
[X] is unpublished.

The opinion of the United States district court appears at Appendix B to the petition and is

[ ] reported at ____________________; or,
[ ] has been designated for publication but is not yet reported; or,
[X] is unpublished.

[ ] For cases from state courts:

The opinion of the highest state court to review the merits appears at Appendix _____ to the petition and is

[ ] reported at ____________________; or,
[ ] has been designated for publication but is not yet reported; or,
[ ] is unpublished.

The opinion of the ____ court appears at Appendix _____ to the petition and is

[ ] reported at ____________________; or,
[ ] has been designated for publication but is not yet reported; or,
[ ] is unpublished.

JURISDICTION

[**X**] For cases from **federal courts**:

The date on which the United States Court of Appeals decided my case

was December 16, 2025.

[**X**] No petition for rehearing was timely filed in my case.

[ ] A timely petition for rehearing was denied by the United States Court of Appeals on the following date: ________________________, and a copy of the order denying rehearing appears at Appendix ________.

[ ] An extension of time to file the petition for a writ of certiorari was granted to and including ____________________(date) on ________________________ (date) in Application No.____ A _____________.

The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U. S. C. § 1254(1).

[ ] For cases from **state courts**:

The date on which the highest state court decided my case was _____________ . A copy of that decision appears at Appendix _______.

[ ] A timely petition for rehearing was thereafter denied on the following date: ________________________, and a copy of the order denying rehearing appears at Appendix _______ .

[ ] An extension of time to ®le the petition for a writ of certiorari was granted to and including ____________________ (date) on ____________________(date) in Application No. _____ A _____________.

The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U. S. C. § 1257(a).

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

U.S. Const. amend. I

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

U.S. Const. amend. V

"No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury… nor shall any person… be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law…"

U.S. Const. amend. VI

"In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial… and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence."

U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1

"…nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law…"

U.S. Const. art. III, § 2

"The judicial Power shall extend to all Cases, in Law and Equity, arising under this Constitution…"

28 U.S.C. § 1254(1)

"Cases in the courts of appeals may be reviewed by the Supreme Court by writ of certiorari…"

SELECTED MAXIMS OF LAW AND EQUITY

Maxims Regarding Justice

All are equal under the law.
A matter must be expressed to be resolved.
Claims made without accountability are void.
Might does not make right.
Perjury or subornation of perjury by force voids all.
Fraud vitiates even the most solemn promise.
While the battle continues, he who first leaves the field or refuses to contend loses by default.
You are free to make any decision, but not free to escape the consequences.
A laborer is worthy of his hire.
Thou shalt not steal.
Notice to agent is notice to principal, and notice to principal is notice to agent.
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Maxims Regarding Truth

Truth stands supreme.
Truth affects but cannot be affected.
Truth is expressed in the form of an affidavit.
An unrebutted affidavit stands as the truth.
An affidavit must be rebutted point-for-point.
Thou shalt not bear false witness.
Ignorance is no respecter of persons—it affects all regardless of title or position.

Maxims Regarding Sovereignty

It is self-evident that all men are endowed by their Creator with equal and unalienable rights.
The created cannot be greater than its creator.
A man can give to another no more than he himself has.
A man may not, with impunity, infringe upon another man's rights.
The people are sovereign.
In America, the government is the servant of the sovereign people.

Maxim Regarding Power and Authority

We cannot give to anyone or anything any power or authority we do not have.

PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE AND EQUITY
(INCLUDING SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS)

"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."
— Bible, Matthew 7:2

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."
— Bible, John 7:24

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone."
— Bible, John 8:7

"A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish."
— Bible, Proverbs 19:9

"He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord."
— Bible, Proverbs 17:15

"Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed."
— Bible, Isaiah 10:1

"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment."
— Bible, Leviticus 19:15

"Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow."
— Bible, Deuteronomy 27:19

"Provide things honest in the sight of all men."
— Bible, Romans 12:17

"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."
— Bible, Luke 12:2

"Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment."
— Bible, Exodus 23:2

"The laborer is worthy of his hire."
— Bible, Luke 10:7

"Let all things be done decently and in order."
— Bible, 1 Corinthians 14:40

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On February 28, 2022, Petitioner Michael-Wayne, III: Bentley was arrested by federal agents. In the course of that encounter, an accidental discharge occurred during the arrest. The United States thereafter prosecuted Petitioner in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, Case No. 2:22-cr-19. At the same time, the State of Tennessee used that same arrest event as the basis for three alleged aggravated-assault charges in Sullivan County, Case No. S75,796. After the federal proceedings concluded and Petitioner was convicted, he was returned to the State proceedings for adjudication of those related charges. Those proceedings remained pending as of the filing of this petition. (App. A at 2a–16a; App. B at 18a–24a; App. C, Ex. C at 51a–52a, 68a–74a.)

The allegations at issue in this petition arose from an approximate six-to-eight-week period in early 2022 initiated by events in 2021 that retriggered and compounded the effects of significant early-childhood trauma, resulting in a brief mental-health crisis. The record further reflects that Petitioner sought to present expert testimony concerning the impact of trauma, impairment, and diminished capacity during this period, but that such evidence was limited or excluded, preventing full development of a defense grounded in Petitioner's mental condition at the time of the alleged conduct (See Chambers v. Mississippi, 410 U.S. 284 (1973); Crane v. Kentucky, 476 U.S. 683 (1986); Boyd v. United States, 116 U.S. 616 (1886)). Prior to that limited period, there was no comparable pattern of conduct. Nevertheless, those allegations carry a potential sentence exceeding 23 years of imprisonment, together with family separation, reputational harm, financial destruction, continuing collateral consequences, and no realistic conditions for obtaining treatment or help. (sealed Sentencing Memorandum, USDC Doc. No. 225, at 6–13; App. C, Ex. C at 64a, 67a, 75a; App. B at 19a–20a.)

Petitioner has consistently maintained that he did not intentionally point or fire a weapon at officers, and that the event at issue involved an accidental discharge while fleeing when scaling a fence. No officer or other individual was struck or injured during the event, and, as a factual matter, Petitioner himself was the only person subjected to gunfire during the encounter. The contemporaneous record reflects that the firearm discharged only once and subsequently jammed, with a spent casing lodged in the chamber and live rounds remaining in the magazine, mechanically preventing further firing. This condition forecloses any sustained firing or "exchange of gunfire" as later suggested and is consistent with Petitioner's account of a single accidental discharge. The record further reflects that law-enforcement testimony established physical positioning that made it impossible for Petitioner to have simultaneously aimed at multiple officers as later alleged, and that testimony was inconsistent as to whether Petitioner used his left or right hand to hold the firearm. The record further reflects that officers holstered their weapons prior to climbing the fence in pursuit, conduct inconsistent with the presence of an immediate and continuing threat. The defense was further restricted from presenting testimony concerning the purpose and context of the firearm, limiting Petitioner's ability to counter the government's implication that the firearm was possessed for drug-related purposes. These facts stand in contrast to the later introduction of claims that Petitioner "pointed" or "attempted to shoot" at officers—assertions that do not appear in the contemporaneous interview conducted on the day of the incident and that conflict with both the physical evidence and the officers' own accounts regarding positioning, sequence of events, and the mechanical condition of the firearm.

The record further reflects that the court did not reconcile these material contradictions or require resolution of conflicting accounts before permitting the case to proceed to verdict (See In re Murchison, 349 U.S. 133 (1955);). (App. C, Ex. C at 68a–75a.)

Petitioner further notes that any preliminary hearing or similar adversarial proceeding that might have allowed for earlier examination of the allegations, witnesses, jurisdictional objections, and inconsistencies in the record was waived upon the advice of appointed counsel. The record further reflects that multiple law-enforcement witnesses were present together prior to testimony, creating a risk of aligned or influenced testimony. Petitioner contends that this advice and circumstances favored conviction because it prevented the early testing of the government's allegations and limited the creation of a record favorable to the defense (See Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984)). (App. C, Ex. C at 68a, 69a, 73a, 75a)

Petitioner further maintains that officers did not comply with applicable body-camera requirements and rebuffed his request for counsel by stating, "This is not tv." The specific officer was not identifiable due to the obstruction of the record, and officers involved in the operation were not readily identifiable due to the absence of clear markings and uniforms. No body-worn cameras or in-vehicle recording systems were used during the arrest or initial custodial encounter, despite applicable Department of Justice directives requiring such recording in planned enforcement operations. The absence of any objective recording deprived Petitioner of contemporaneous evidence and left the record dependent upon later testimonial reconstruction, thereby impairing the ability to reliably reconstruct events. The initial custodial interaction occurred when Petitioner was being placed into a patrol vehicle immediately following the arrest and was not recorded. Petitioner testified under oath that he requested counsel at that time and was refused (See Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U.S. 436 (1966)). Because that interaction was not recorded, the record does not capture the request, and no recording exists to resolve the dispute concerning whether counsel was invoked at that stage. The record further reflects that any subsequent interaction with law enforcement occurred only after that unrecorded custodial encounter and in the context of Petitioner's documented mental-health instability, a factor bearing on the voluntariness of any statements obtained thereafter. Any later-recorded interview cannot cure or negate any prior violation associated with that unrecorded custodial encounter. Petitioner's position is that the conviction resulted not only from the court's refusal to address jurisdiction, but also from misconduct and procedural violations by the prosecution, agents, and court, as further reflected in the private administrative record and the Affidavit of Record Correction. (App. C, Ex. C at 68a–74a.)

The record further reflects that another individual provided Petitioner's telephone number to the individual identified by law enforcement as connected to the cartel and that the initial contact was initiated by that individual rather than by Petitioner. During custodial interactions, law enforcement suggested that cooperation could result in more favorable treatment, including potential reduction of consequences, thereby introducing inducement bearing on the voluntariness of Petitioner's statements and decisions (See Arizona v. Fulminante, 499 U.S. 279 (1991)). The record further reflects that Petitioner's alleged consent to search his cellular telephone, including disclosure of the passcode, was obtained at the scene immediately following the incident while Petitioner remained in an "amped up" state, and that the documentation associated with that consent was assembled after the fact using forms obtained from other personnel on scene. The record further reflects that law enforcement lost visual contact for a period of time prior to the arrest, preventing continuous observation and undermining any claim of uninterrupted knowledge of Petitioner's actions or intent. (App. C, Ex. C at 65a, 70a, 71a.)

To the extent the government alleged a conspiracy, the evidence at trial showed involvement limited to Petitioner, the individual who provided his telephone number, and the person identified as connected to the cartel, with no indication of broader co-conspirators directing or participating in coordinated activity. Trial testimony and recorded communications further reflect that Petitioner was frequently responding to directions, requests, and pressure from others during this period rather than directing events himself, and that his statements often appeared confused, disorganized, and lacking in coherent control over the circumstances. The evidence further reflects that this period was marked by escalating mental-health instability, prolonged sleep deprivation associated with drug use, and an overall deterioration in Petitioner's judgment, coherence, and ability to control the circumstances around him. While courts routinely conduct a detailed plea colloquy to ensure a defendant is not impaired before accepting a plea, no comparable on-the-record inquiry or safeguard was applied when Petitioner was advised of and purportedly waived his Miranda rights during custodial interrogation amid the documented mental-health crisis and substance-related impairment (See Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U.S. 436 (1966)). Petitioner's position is that the record does not show a stable or profit-driven criminal enterprise, as there was little or no evidence of completed sales, meaningful financial gain, ongoing business activity, or actual possession of narcotics by Petitioner. (App. C, Ex. C at 64a, 65a, 67a, 70a, 71a; Johnson Grand Jury Tr., Mar. 16, 2022, at 16:4–6; Trial Tr. of Agent Johnson, at 134:7–13; Audio Recordings admitted at trial.)

Petitioner repeatedly asked appointed attorneys to challenge jurisdiction. Counsel would not do so, multiple appointed attorneys withdrew, and Petitioner was repeatedly informed that if additional counsel withdrew he could be forced to proceed alone. During the initial proceedings, Petitioner sought to address the governing authority of the Supreme Law and relevant Supreme Court rulings as the primary controlling factors of the case. However, when these foundational issues were raised, Petitioner was advised by counsel that such arguments were "for later" stages of the litigation. This procedural deferment suggests a systemic architecture designed to bypass the Supreme Law at the onset, forcing a litigant to navigate the lower courts' rules even when those rules may stand in direct conflict with higher protections. By effectively barring a jurisdictional challenge until the appellate level, the lower courts allowed the proceedings to move forward in a state of unchecked authority, essentially permitting the damage to be done before any corrective measure could be considered (See Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984)). (App. C, Ex. C at 52a, 53a, 57a, 63a, 65a–67a, 75a, 77a.)

This requirement—that a citizen must endure a complete trial and the resulting exhaustion of resources before the "Supreme Law of the Land" is even acknowledged—constitutes a functional violation of the right to a timely and meaningful remedy. It creates a profound imbalance in the scales of justice, where the administrative power of the lower courts is granted immediate momentum while the Petitioner's fundamental rights are relegated to a distant, secondary concern. This structural delay ensures that by the time a court of competent jurisdiction finally addresses the controlling law, the injury to the Petitioner is already absolute. Such a system does not protect the law or rights; it merely manages the fallout of its violation, leaving the Petitioner in a position where justice is perpetually delayed until after the damage has become irreparable (See Mathews v. Eldridge, 424 U.S. 319 (1976)).

Petitioner was effectively forced onto the record as pro se, although he styled himself sui juris and in propria persona (See Faretta v. California, 422 U.S. 806 (1975)). When Petitioner attempted to proceed on that basis and place his jurisdictional objections before the court, those objections were not adjudicated on the merits. No meaningful inquiry was made into whether counsel's refusal to raise jurisdictional and constitutional objections created a conflict that impaired Petitioner's right to effective assistance (See Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984)). (App. C, Ex. C at 53a, 63a, 65a, 66a, 67a, 76a.)

Petitioner also objected to the court's entry of a plea on his behalf after he refused to participate in what he viewed as a contractual plea process (See Boykin v. Alabama, 395 U.S. 238 (1969)). (App. C, Ex. C at 66a.)

Judge Greer later pressured Petitioner to accept appointed counsel, but Petitioner objected on the ground that appointed counsel would not present the jurisdictional and constitutional challenges he was attempting to preserve (See Faretta v. California, 422 U.S. 806 (1975)). Petitioner also objected to the court's refusal to identify the precise jurisdiction under which it proceeded and to the refusal to permit argument concerning the absence of an injured party, corpus delicti, contractual nexus, or other jurisdictional basis. Petitioner maintains that he was not permitted to fully present common-law defenses or jurisdictional objections before the jury. The record further reflects that, throughout the federal district-court proceedings, jail-mail delays and repeated interference with Petitioner's legal materials substantially impaired his ability to receive documents, communicate effectively, and prepare for hearings, including confiscation of legal materials, restrictions preventing receipt of legal documents except through licensed counsel, and repeated deprivation of access to filings necessary to prepare and present a defense (See Bounds v. Smith, 430 U.S. 817 (1977)). (App. C, Ex. C at 63a, 65a, 66a, 67a, 74a, 75a, 77a.)

Before trial, Petitioner also filed a writ of habeas corpus in the United States District Court raising jurisdictional and constitutional objections, but the writ was denied without explanation. The record further reflects that the denial occurred without meaningful engagement with the substance of the claims presented, leaving the jurisdictional and constitutional issues unresolved at that stage (See Townsend v. Sain, 372 U.S. 293 (1963)). (App. C, Ex. C at 65a, 66a, 74a.)

Petitioner then proceeded through trial under protest and was convicted. At sentencing, Petitioner maintains that the court relied upon his views about government and jurisdiction, disparaged his religious beliefs, characterized his court filings, cited legal authorities, and referenced court rulings as "crazy" rather than addressing them on the merits, and used those filings and statements as aggravating factors (See Dawson v. Delaware, 503 U.S. 159 (1992)). The record further reflects that, during closing argument, the prosecution made statements expressing personal belief in Petitioner's guilt, introduced speculative assertions regarding Petitioner's intent, and advanced narrative claims not grounded in the evidentiary record, thereby compounding the risk that the verdict was influenced by argument rather than admissible proof (See Berger v. United States, 295 U.S. 78 (1935)). (App. C, Ex. C at 64a, 65a, 66a, 75a, 76a.)

Petitioner further maintains that the repeated refusal of the court and counsel to answer basic questions concerning the source and scope of the court's jurisdiction only deepened Petitioner's concern that the proceedings were being conducted without a clearly stated jurisdictional basis. Petitioner repeatedly asked what jurisdiction applied, what authority supported the proceeding, and whether the matter was being treated as a common-law, statutory, admiralty, or penal action, but those questions were either dismissed, ignored, or characterized as improper. The record further reflects that when Petitioner directly asked the court on the record to identify the specific jurisdiction under which it was proceeding, the court declined to provide a direct answer and continued the proceedings without clarifying the asserted jurisdictional basis. Petitioner's position is that the continued refusal to answer such threshold questions undermined confidence in the fairness and legitimacy of the proceedings and created the appearance that the jurisdictional basis of the prosecution could not be openly stated on the record (See In re Murchison, 349 U.S. 133 (1955)). (App. C, Ex. C at 65a, 77a, 78a.)

After the federal judgment, Petitioner intended to continue on appeal in his own capacity. Instead, appellate counsel was appointed over Petitioner's objection, and Petitioner was not permitted to proceed pro se on the record in the appellate court. When Petitioner attempted to submit his own jurisdictional filing in the Sixth Circuit, including a writ of quo warranto challenging the authority of the court, the submission was returned and not docketed. The appellate court thereafter entered an order stating that Petitioner could not proceed pro se because of the burdens associated with incarceration and litigating from jail. Petitioner's position is that the refusal to permit pro se participation on appeal, particularly after the attempted filing of the writ of quo warranto and related jurisdictional objections, prevented those constitutional and jurisdictional issues from being directly presented by Petitioner himself. Because pro se filings were not allowed and transcript requests had to be made through counsel, Petitioner was also obstructed from independently obtaining portions of the record necessary to demonstrate what had occurred below and to fully present the issues arising from the proceedings below. (App. C, Ex. C at 64a, 65a, 74a, 75a.)

After the federal proceedings concluded and while the related State charges remained pending, the interests associated with Michael-Wayne, III: Bentley were conveyed into the private common-law trust identified in the record as the MICHAEL WAYNE BENTLEY III© Trust. Petitioner is First Trustee of the Trust, and Sharla-Gay: Bentley serves as Second Trustee. The Trustees determined that Sharla-Gay: Bentley would undertake the private administrative process in her trustee capacity while the related State proceedings remained unresolved. (App. C, Ex. F at 133a; App. C, Ex. G at 135a–137a; App. C, Ex. H at 139a–140a.)

Petitioner's position, as more fully set out in the Memorandum of Law, is that the federal and State governments present the legal person identified by the Birth Certificate and Social Security Number as a separate legal estate or entity distinct from the living man himself. Petitioner further maintains, as explained in the Memorandum of Law, that courts exercising statutory or admiralty-maritime jurisdiction, rather than true Article III courts of common-law record, could proceed only against that legal person as the commercial vessel or res, while improperly treating the living man as the surety for that legal person. (App. D.)

Acting in that role, the Trustee issued notices, affidavits, demands, notices of default, notices of continuing default, invoices, and related filings directed to the judges, magistrate judge, prosecutors, agents, and other actors involved in the proceedings for violations against the Trust property, body, liberty interests, and securities associated with the estate. The Trustee also sought an accounting concerning bonds, financial instruments, criminal bonds, registry accounts, CRIS-related records, and other commercial interests allegedly associated with the proceedings, but no accounting was provided. That private administrative process was undertaken under Petitioner's asserted common-law rights of notice, opportunity to cure, affidavit, acquiescence by silence, and reservation of rights, together with the commercial principles and provisions cited throughout the notices, affidavits, and related filings, including the Uniform Commercial Code. The record further reflects that these notices and affidavits were issued in a defined sequence: a Notice and Demand providing opportunity to cure, followed by an Affidavit of Truth and Notice of Default when no response was made, and thereafter a Commercial Affidavit and Notice of Liability upon continued non-response, each incorporating the prior unrebutted record. Despite documented service upon the courts, clerks, prosecutors, and agents, no point-by-point rebuttal under oath was ever provided, nor was any verified proof of jurisdiction, injured party in fact, or contractual nexus produced after demand. Instead, filings were returned, refused, or left unaddressed, and the proceedings continued forward without adjudicating the issues raised in the sworn administrative record. (App. C, Ex. C at 46a – 81a)

The record further reflects that filings submitted by the Trustee were often rejected, returned, mischaracterized, or not addressed on the terms in which they were presented. In at least one order, the court expressly mischaracterized the Trustee's filings as unauthorized submissions made on behalf of Petitioner under a power of attorney, despite the fact that the filings were signed solely in trustee capacity and expressly stated that they were not being submitted on Petitioner's behalf personally. Petitioner further maintains that no adequate explanation was provided as to why only licensed attorneys were permitted to submit filings on the record, while filings submitted in trustee capacity, in propria persona, or under claimed common-law rights were rejected, returned, or treated as unauthorized. Petitioner's position is that the courts repeatedly refused to recognize the Trustee's status, the Trust instruments, the affidavits, the notices, the financing statements, and the other recorded documents establishing the identity of the proper party in interest. That sequence is detailed in Appendix C and is incorporated here by reference (See Chambers v. Baltimore & Ohio R.R. Co., 207 U.S. 142 (1907)). (App. C, Ex. C at 46a–81a; App. D at 121a, 122a.)

When the federal respondents did not cure, when the Sullivan County criminal-court respondents also failed to cure after notice and opportunity to respond, and as the related State criminal proceedings remained pending, the Trustee filed a Verified Bill in Equity in Sullivan County Chancery Court against both the federal and State respondents. That equity matter remains part of the overall procedural history because it was filed to address ongoing harm, lack of remedy at law, continuing defaults, and the absence of any lawful response to the private record. Petitioner relies on that equity history here as further evidence that repeated attempts to obtain lawful review and remedy were made and ignored. (App. C, Ex. E at 125a–132a).

The Trustee also filed complaints with the Tennessee Attorney General, the U.S. Attorney General/United States Department of Justice, the Office of Inspector General, and other oversight bodies; filed a misconduct complaint regarding Judge Greer and Magistrate Wyrick with the Chief Executive at the Sixth Circuit; filed an Affidavit of Record Correction to rebut and correct the appellate opinion; noticed approximately twenty agencies; and, after approximately eight months of default and non-response, filed a commercial lien on April 11, 2026 naming both Judge Greer and Judge Goodwin as debtors. That history is part of the record because it shows the repeated attempts to obtain correction, accounting, and remedy before the lien filing occurred. (App. D at 164a).

The Affidavit of Record Correction was originally prepared and executed by Sharla-Gay: Bentley in her trustee capacity. Petitioner nevertheless adopts and incorporates that affidavit, together with its addenda concerning non-response, continuing harm, and systemic and enterprise misconduct, as reflecting his own position regarding the proceedings below, on appeal, and the continuing harm that followed from blocked filings, unresolved jurisdictional challenges, and non-response by courts and agencies. Petitioner further incorporates the Affidavit of Record Correction not merely as background, but as a sworn correction of material omissions and mischaracterizations in the appellate opinion and as the corrected record of what occurred in the proceedings below and on appeal. (App. C, Ex. D at 108a-124a.)

Petitioner also incorporates and relies upon the Memorandum of Law attached as Appendix D as the statement of the legal reasoning underlying the jurisdictional objections, the Trustee's administrative process, the claimed requirement of an injured party or contractual nexus, and the rationale for the subsequent lien filings after continued non-response. The memorandum is attached not as a substitute for the petition, but as supporting legal context for the record and the questions presented. (App. D at 144a-168a.).

The Petitioner recognizes that the Memorandum of Law incorporated in this matter may contain imperfections, incomplete linkages, or concepts that are not exhaustively developed. There is no established curriculum for many of the issues raised herein, particularly where the questions concern the overlap of constitutional structure, administrative practice, commercial process, and the practical realities experienced by ordinary people moving through the courts. The Memorandum was prepared in good faith under pressing time constraints and the limitations inherent in incarceration as an attempt to make sense of undeniable facts, personal experience, and the resulting contradictions that have emerged throughout this journey.

The people of this Nation are taught that they are free men and women whose rights are protected by law. Yet those rights do not feel protected when liberty — one of the most fundamental unalienable rights — can be taken so easily and with so little meaningful review. When such contradictions arise, they naturally lead to the questions repeatedly raised throughout this process. Are free men not entitled to answers from those who first initiate the controversy by alienating the very rights they are entrusted to protect? Is liberty so lightly regarded that it may be taken without verified injury, due process, or true accountability? (see Lynch v. Household Finance Corp.)

If liberty may be taken so easily, then there exists a profound dissonance between the founding principles of this Nation and the sacrifices of those who died to secure those rights, on the one hand, and the governmental structure that exists today, on the other. When courts and public officials tolerate such a disconnect, they establish a broader example for society. The result is a people increasingly conditioned to ignore contradictions, to accept what they know internally does not make sense, and to lose the ability to recognize the disconnect itself.

The Petitioner contends that the fruits of the present system, developed through a long train of usurpations and departures from constitutional principles, are repugnant to the Constitution and to the self-evident truths declared at the founding of this Nation. The system appears to seek order through fear, intimidation, and coercion, as though free men can be herded like animals through procedures, when true law and order were intended to flow from above — from the clear chain of authority expressed in the Nation's founding documents and the principles upon which they were built.

The circumstances of this case did require intervention and accountability. However, what was needed at its core was remedy, balance, and justice — not the destruction of liberty through excessive punishment and the reduction of a man into surety for debts created by institutions that were intended to serve the people rather than rule over them.

The Petitioner notes that this experience has been profound and life-changing, allowing for observation of the system from the street level through the highest levels of review. Through that experience has come an awareness of the personal reformation necessary in the Petitioner's own life, as well as the broader reformation needed within society, if liberty and justice are to be preserved for posterity and if the Nation is to reconcile itself once again with the self-evident truths upon which it was founded.

Petitioner further notes that, when the related State proceedings remained unresolved and the Chancery matter remained unadjudicated, the Trustee sought extraordinary relief in the Tennessee Supreme Court. A petition was submitted, a cure was made to issues identified by the clerk, and the matter was then denied in a one-word denial without explanation. That history is included in Appendix E because it further demonstrates the repeated refusal of reviewing courts to address the underlying jurisdictional and remedial issues. (App. E at 169a–187a.)

Finally, Petitioner states that the repeated refusals to address the jurisdictional and constitutional issues raised herein, combined with the obstruction of filings, non-response to notices, and the subsequent lien filing naming sitting judges as debtors, create a substantial concern that additional retaliatory measures or further lawfare may occur in place of a direct response to the issues presented. Petitioner's position is that the pattern reflected throughout the federal proceedings, appellate proceedings, State proceedings, and related administrative responses demonstrates the use of process as a means of punishment and exhaustion rather than lawful adjudication of the issues raised (See Arizona v. Fulminante, 499 U.S. 279 (1991)). Petitioner includes that point not to enlarge the petition beyond the record, but because the Memorandum of Law and the private administrative record expressly describe the lien filings as having been made only after extended default, repeated notice, and the exhaustion of other attempted remedies.

To the extent the detailed examples of official and agent misconduct, filing obstruction, returned submissions, sealed or inaccessible entries, transcript-based contradictions, failures to disclose financial instruments, or other factual details are not reproduced in full within this petition, Petitioner relies upon the attached Affidavit of Record Correction, the private administrative record, the Memorandum of Law, the Chancery proceedings, the Tennessee Supreme Court proceedings, and the lower-court dockets and proceedings incorporated therein. Detailed references to the underlying hearings, docket entries, filings, and transcript citations concerning these events are set out in the Affidavit of Truth and Notice of Default contained within the private administrative process attached herein. Petitioner further states that some transcript material and sealed entries could not be fully accessed because of the unlawful imposition of appellate counsel and the return or blockage of Petitioner's and the Trustee's own submissions. (See Apps. C–E.)

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

I. This Case Presents Important and Recurring Questions Concerning Jurisdiction, Self-Representation, and the Right to Present a Defense.

This case presents fundamental constitutional questions concerning (1) the authority of a court to proceed without clearly identifying the basis of its jurisdiction, (2) the right of an accused to represent himself and control the objectives of his defense, and (3) the right to present a complete theory of defense grounded in the facts and law *(See Faretta v. California, 422 U.S. 806 (1975); Crane v. Kentucky, 476 U.S. 683 (1986)).*

Petitioner consistently challenged the basis upon which the courts asserted authority to proceed, including the absence of a clearly identified jurisdictional foundation and the failure to meaningfully adjudicate those challenges. Those objections were excluded, restricted, or dismissed without substantive analysis.

These questions extend beyond this case. They concern whether courts may avoid addressing jurisdictional and constitutional objections by declining to engage their substance, thereby preventing the creation of a meaningful record for review.

II. The Decision Below Conflicts With This Court's Precedents Protecting the Right to Self-Representation and Autonomy in Defense.

This Court has long recognized that the Sixth Amendment protects not only the right to counsel, but also the right of a defendant to represent himself and to determine the objectives of his defense *(See Faretta v. California, 422 U.S. 806 (1975)).*

Here, Petitioner repeatedly sought to proceed on his own behalf and to advance specific jurisdictional and constitutional arguments. Multiple appointed attorneys withdrew after Petitioner insisted those issues be raised. When Petitioner proceeded pro se, the court nonetheless restricted the scope of the arguments he was permitted to present.

On appeal, Petitioner was not permitted to proceed fully on his own behalf and was prevented from submitting filings advancing those same objections. As a result, the appellate decision reflects only the issues selected by appointed counsel.

This case presents an important question concerning whether the right to self-representation includes the right to present one's own legal theory—particularly jurisdictional objections—both at trial and on appeal.

III. The Lower Courts Departed From Established Due Process Principles by Refusing to Adjudicate Jurisdictional Challenges.

It is a foundational principle that a court must possess and establish the basis of its jurisdiction before it may lawfully deprive a person of liberty *(See Steel Co. v. Citizens for a Better Env't, 523 U.S. 83 (1998); McNutt v. General Motors Acceptance Corp., 298 U.S. 178 (1936)).*

Petitioner repeatedly demanded identification of the jurisdiction under which the courts proceeded and adjudication of those objections. Those requests went unanswered. The courts did not identify the jurisdictional foundation on the record and did not permit meaningful litigation of those questions.

The refusal to identify the basis of jurisdiction while simultaneously prohibiting the accused from litigating that issue creates a silent record incompatible with due process *(See In re Murchison, 349 U.S. 133 (1955); Marshall v. Jerrico, Inc., 446 U.S. 238 (1980)).*

IV. The Courts Below Obstructed Access to the Courts and Prevented the Creation of a Meaningful Record for Review.

Petitioner alleges that filings were returned without docketing, that jurisdictional submissions were rejected, and that petitions were denied without meaningful explanation.

Petitioner was further restricted in access to transcripts, legal materials, and the ability to submit filings independently. These actions prevented the development of a complete record and deprived Petitioner of meaningful appellate review *(See Bounds v. Smith, 430 U.S. 817 (1977); Hagans v. Lavine, 415 U.S. 528 (1974)).*

This case presents the important question whether courts may effectively insulate their decisions from review by declining to accept or address filings raising constitutional issues.

V. The Case Presents Structural Errors Affecting the Framework of the Proceedings.

The errors alleged here are not limited to discrete rulings. They concern the overall structure within which the proceedings occurred.

Petitioner alleges that he was:

- prevented from fully representing himself,
- prevented from presenting his theory of defense,
- prevented from obtaining rulings on jurisdictional objections,
- prevented from accessing the courts, and
- prevented from securing meaningful appellate review.

If established, such errors affect the entire framework of the proceedings and cannot be treated as harmless (*See Arizona v. Fulminante, 499 U.S. 279 (1991); Tumey v. Ohio, 273 U.S. 510 (1927)).*

VI. The Decision Below Reflects a Growing Practice of Resolving Constitutional Claims by Label Rather Than Analysis.

Petitioner's arguments were repeatedly characterized rather than addressed on their legal merits.

The use of such labels permits courts to bypass the obligation to determine whether jurisdiction exists and whether constitutional rights have been violated *(See Chambers v. Mississippi, 410 U.S. 284 (1973))*.

This case presents the question whether constitutional claims may be rejected without substantive adjudication.

VII. This Case Presents Important Questions Concerning the Distinction Between Competency, Communication, and Autonomy.

Petitioner repeatedly asserted that appointed counsel refused to advance central components of his defense and that he could not effectively communicate those issues.

The courts treated these concerns as issues of competency rather than autonomy. However, this Court has recognized that competency and the right to control one's defense are distinct inquiries.

This case presents the question whether courts may override a defendant's autonomy interests by reframing them as competency concerns.

VIII. This Case Presents Recurring Questions of National Importance.

The issues presented here are not unique. Questions concerning jurisdiction, self-representation, and the ability to present legal defenses arise with increasing frequency.

Lower courts often respond by declining to engage such claims on the merits. This case presents an opportunity for this Court to clarify the standards governing their adjudication.

IX. Review Is Warranted Under Supreme Court Rule 10.

This case warrants review under Rule 10 because it presents important questions of federal law that have not been, but should be, settled by this Court, and because the proceedings below departed from accepted judicial practice in ways that implicate fundamental constitutional protections.

X. Petitioner Continues to Suffer Ongoing Harm.

Petitioner remains confined as a result of the proceedings described herein, and related state proceedings remain pending.

The alleged violations—particularly the failure to adjudicate jurisdiction, the restriction on self-representation, and the obstruction of access to the courts—continue to have direct and ongoing consequences.

Absent review, those harms will persist.

CONCLUSION

Petitioner's position is that the record reflects a pattern of lawfare, coercion, procedural obstruction, and refusal to address the underlying jurisdictional and constitutional questions raised throughout the proceedings. Rather than respond directly to the issues presented, the courts and related actors allegedly relied upon labels, blocked filings, imposed unwanted counsel, restricted the presentation of defenses, prevented meaningful self-representation, and denied meaningful review of Petitioner's objections.

Petitioner contends that this pattern transformed the process itself into a mechanism of punishment and exhaustion rather than a lawful adjudication of the issues raised. The errors alleged are structural because they concern the framework within which the proceedings occurred, including the court's asserted authority to proceed, the right to present a defense, the right to determine the objectives of that defense, the right to meaningful self-representation, and the right to meaningful access to the courts.

Review is warranted because the questions presented concern recurring issues of national importance involving self-representation, the forced imposition of counsel, the right to present jurisdictional objections and defenses, the ability to access and develop the record for appeal, and the extent to which lower courts may refuse to address filings and objections on the merits. These questions affect not only Petitioner, but other criminal defendants who seek to preserve constitutional objections outside the theories favored by appointed counsel or the courts.

Petitioner further contends that these issues are not unique to this case, but are recurring and increasingly common in criminal proceedings where defendants seek to challenge jurisdiction, present alternative legal theories, or insist upon direct answers regarding the basis upon which liberty may be deprived.

Absent review by this Court, Petitioner will continue to suffer ongoing harm through continued confinement, pending related State proceedings arising from the same underlying events, and the continued refusal of lower courts to address the underlying constitutional and jurisdictional issues raised herein.

For those reasons, the petition for writ of certiorari should be granted.

Respectfully submitted,

By: Michael-Wayne, III: Bentley

Michael-Wayne, III: Bentley
Sullivan County Jail
P.O. Box 610
Blountville, TN 37617
Date: 4-24-2026

Mailing Address for Correspondence:
c/o MICHAEL WAYNE BENTLEY III© Trust
6316 Heatherwood Ln
Kingsport, TN 37663