

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

No. 25-3438

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS,
Appellant

On Appeal from the United States District Court
for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
(D.C. Criminal Action No. 2:02-cr-00172-007)
District Judge: Honorable Mia R. Perez

Submitted on Appellee's Motion for Summary Action
Pursuant to Third Circuit LAR 27.4 and I.O.P. 10.6
August 20, 2026
Before: KRAUSE, MATEY, and BOVE, *Circuit Judges*

(Opinion filed September 17, 2026)

OPINION*

PER CURIAM

* This disposition is not an opinion of the full Court and pursuant to I.O.P. 5.7 does not constitute binding precedent.

Appellant Christopher Williams, proceeding pro se, appeals from the District Court's denial of his motion for compassionate release filed pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3582. The Government has filed a motion for summary affirmance and for leave to be excused from filing a brief, and Williams has filed a motion for the appointment of counsel. For the following reasons, Williams's motion is denied, the Government's motion is granted, and we will summarily affirm the District Court's judgment.

In 2004, after a jury trial in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Williams was convicted of conspiracy to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine and 50 grams or more of crack, *see* 21 U.S.C. § 846, and two counts of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime, *see* 18 U.S.C. § 924(c). As we explained on direct appeal, Williams was a senior member of a massive drug conspiracy who was involved in a number of shootings (including a murder) in support of the conspiracy and who "attempted repeatedly to intimidate witnesses, threatening to kill them and their families." *United States v. Williams*, 2007 WL 3122171, at *1 (3d Cir. Oct. 26, 2007).

Williams was initially sentenced to life imprisonment on the conspiracy count, plus a mandatory consecutive 30-year sentence on the § 924(c) counts. *See id.* (affirming initial sentence following resentencing). He later obtained a sentence reduction under Section 404 of the First Step Act of 2018; his sentence was reduced to 540 months in prison. *See United States v. Williams*, 2024 WL 937048, at *1 (3d Cir. Mar. 5, 2024) (per

curiam). And in January 2025, President Biden commuted Williams's sentence to a term of 350 months.

Williams subsequently filed a motion for compassionate release based on his rehabilitation, the length of his original sentence, his amount of time served, his youth at the time of the offense, a disparity in sentencing, and an impermissible sentence having been imposed on the second § 924(c) charge. The District Court denied relief, and Williams filed a motion for reconsideration, arguing that the District Court failed to address his claim regarding the § 924(c) charge. The court summarily denied reconsideration. Williams timely appealed. While this appeal was pending, he was released to community confinement and moved to a residential reentry center. His minimum release date is currently May 8, 2027.

We have jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1291. We review the District Court's denials of Williams's motions for abuse of discretion and will not disturb those decisions absent "a definite and firm conviction that [the District Court] committed a clear error of judgment." *United States v. Pawlowski*, 967 F.3d 327, 330 (3d Cir. 2020) (citation modified); *see United States v. Kalb*, 891 F.3d 455, 459 (3d Cir. 2018). We may summarily affirm the District Court's decision if the appeal fails to present a substantial question. *See* 3d Cir. L.A.R. 27.4; 3d Cir. I.O.P. 10.6.

Williams contends that the District Court erred by failing to address his argument that his sentence on the second § 924(c) charge is invalid under the Double Jeopardy Clause, *see United States v. Diaz*, 592 F.3d 467, 474-75 (3d Cir. 2010) (holding that the

Double Jeopardy Clause prohibits imposing two consecutive sentences for possession of a firearm in furtherance of drug trafficking under § 924(c) when a defendant was convicted of only one predicate drug trafficking offense).¹ However, the Supreme Court has made it clear that such a challenge belongs in a § 2255 motion, not a compassionate release motion. *Fernandez v. United States*, 608 U.S. ----, 146 S. Ct. 1292, 1305 (2026) (explaining that, when “a prisoner attack[s] the validity of his confinement and seeks either immediate release from that confinement or the shortening of its duration, his claim belongs under the umbrella of” habeas, not compassionate release (citation modified)). Therefore, the District Court properly determined that the invalidity of a conviction does not provide a basis for compassionate release.

Nor did the District Court err in concluding that Williams’s other arguments—his rehabilitation, length of sentence, time-served, and youth at the time of the offense—likewise do not constitute extraordinary and compelling reasons warranting compassionate release. *See United States v. Stewart*, 86 F.4th 532, 536 (3d Cir. 2023) (rehabilitation); *see also United States v. Andrews*, 12 F.4th 255, 260-61 (3d Cir. 2021) (sentence duration); *United States v. Bryant*, 144 F.4th 1119, 1129 (9th Cir. 2025) (youth). Thus, the District Court did not abuse its discretion in determining that Williams

¹ Contrary to Williams’s assertions, we are satisfied that the District Court’s opinion here reflects that it met its obligation to consider Williams’s “nonfrivolous arguments before it.” *United States v. Concepcion*, 597 U.S. 481, 501 (2022).

failed to show “extraordinary and compelling reasons” warranting compassionate release and denying reconsideration. 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i).²

In addition, Williams argues that the District Court “misapplied the 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) factors” and failed to consider his “youth at the time of the offense, extraordinary rehabilitation, institutional leadership, low recidivism risk, and imminent RRC placement.” C.A. Doc. 7 at 2-3. However, because he failed to establish such “extraordinary and compelling reasons,” the District Court did not need to consider the § 3553(a) factors. *See Rutherford v. United States*, 608 U.S. ----, 146 S. Ct. 1320, 1333 (2026). Nevertheless, we discern no abuse of discretion in the District Court’s conclusion that, even if Williams had shown such circumstances, the § 3553(a) sentencing factors did not support release. *See Concepcion*, 597 U.S. at 499-502. The court acknowledged Williams’s youth and “meaningful strides toward rehabilitation,” and considered sentencing disparities with his co-defendants but reasonably concluded that several factors—the seriousness of Williams’s offenses, his leadership role in the drug conspiracy, and the need to promote respect for the law—outweighed these considerations. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a)(1), (2); *see also Pawlowski*, 967 F.3d at 330-31

² Williams argues that the District Court’s decision conflicts with the Supreme Court’s precedent in *Concepcion*. However, the Court in *Concepcion* did not address the issue here: what qualifies as an “extraordinary and compelling” reason under the compassionate release statute. *See Stewart*, 86 F.4th at 535 (explaining that “Stewart’s reliance on the Supreme Court’s reasoning in *Concepcion* is misplaced because the issue here is whether he . . . is *eligible* for a sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(1)(A)”).

(denying motion for compassionate release considering, inter alia, the seriousness of the defendant's crimes and need to promote respect for the law).

Because Williams's appeal does not present a substantial question, we deny his motion for counsel, grant the Government's motion, and will summarily affirm the judgment of the District Court.