



Federal *Pro Se* Clinic

CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA: WESTERN DIVISION

❑ Can I Appeal the Decision in My State Case ❑ to the Federal District Court?

Generally, **NO**, you cannot appeal your state judgment in federal district court. Federal district courts do not have authority to review the decisions of state courts. (By contrast, the United States Supreme Court has authority to review certain decisions by state courts. See 28 U.S.C. §1257.)

The ***Rooker-Feldman doctrine*** explains that once you have obtained a final judgment from a state court, you cannot jump to the federal district court seeking to re-litigate issues that have already been decided at the state level.

Courts apply the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine when the following **four factors** are present:

1. The plaintiff seeking to bring a claim in federal district court has already lost on that claim in state court;
2. The plaintiff is complaining that the state court judgment caused him some sort of injury or harm;
3. The plaintiff is asking the federal district court to review and overturn the state judgment; and
4. The state court finalized its decision on the claim before the federal district court began its own proceedings.

See *Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Saudi Basic Industries Corp.*, 544 U.S. 280 (2005). This case explains when the doctrine applies and a number of instances when it does not apply.

The *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine **does not bar a plaintiff from presenting a facial challenge to the constitutionality of a state statute in federal court**, even if a state court previously applied that state statute against the plaintiff. This is a complicated area of the law, and Public Counsel recommends that you do further research before bringing such a claim. See, for example, *Noel v. Hall*, 341 F.3d 1148 (9th Cir. 2003).

Finally, **you may appeal the ruling of a federal administrative agency** (e.g., the decision of a Social Security ALJ) in federal district court. Unless a statute states otherwise, individuals seeking to appeal the decision of a federal administrative agency should go first to the federal district court. *Int'l Broth. of Teamsters v. Pena*, 17 F.3d 1478, 1482 (D.C. Cir. 1994).

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