

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Colton James Rood v. Secretary of CDCR, et al.

Rood v. Secretary of CDCR · No. 1:22-cv-00449-SAB (PC) · Decided May 27, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California denied without prejudice Plaintiff Colton James Rood’s motion to file two inmate declarations under seal. The court held that the motion did not provide specific reasons, authority, duration, access information, or document-by-document justification sufficient to overcome the presumption of public access, and ordered the Clerk to return the documents to Plaintiff.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Stanley A. Boone
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	May 27, 2025
DOCKET	1:22-cv-00449-SAB (PC)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis in a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 civil rights action, moved to file two inmate declarations under seal. The district court denied the motion without prejudice and ordered the Clerk to return the documents.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A party seeking to seal a judicial record must overcome the strong presumption of public access by showing compelling reasons supported by specific factual findings. When the material is only tangentially related to the merits, the good-cause standard applies. The court balances the public's interests against the interests of the party seeking secrecy.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished and nonprecedential district court order

TOPICS

- civil procedure
- public records
- prisoners rights
- civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

prisoner civil rights

public access to judicial records

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff established sufficient grounds under the applicable public-access and sealing standards to file two inmate declarations under seal.
2. Whether the court should accept and retain the declarations as evidence before they were submitted in connection with a motion for summary judgment, trial, or at the court's request.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff failed to overcome the presumption of public access or otherwise demonstrate good cause for sealing the declarations because he did not articulate specific reasons supporting the sealing of each document and did not provide the information required by Local Rule 141(b).
2. The court would not serve as a repository for evidence improperly submitted before it was needed in connection with a motion for summary judgment, trial, or a court request, and the Clerk was ordered to return the documents to Plaintiff.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A party seeking to seal a judicial record ... bears the burden of overcoming the strong presumption by meeting the ‘compelling reasons standard.’” (at 1)

“The Court will not serve as a repository for evidence. The parties may not file evidence (prison, disciplinary or medical records, witness affidavits, etc.) with the Court until it becomes necessary to do so in connection with a motion for summary judgment, trial or the Court requests otherwise.” (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff sought to seal two declarations from inmate witnesses in his § 1983 action. He asserted generally that disclosure of the witnesses' names and CDCR numbers could expose them to retaliation or harm. The motion did not identify specific reasons for sealing each item, did not establish how the declarations related to the claims, and did not provide the information required by Local Rule 141(b).

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed a motion on May 9, 2025, seeking to file two inmate declarations under seal because they allegedly contained witnesses' full names and CDCR numbers. The court found that the motion did not provide specific reasons for sealing each document or the information required by Local Rule 141(b), and denied the motion without prejudice. The court also ordered the Clerk to return the documents to Plaintiff.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Kamakana v. City & County of Honolulu, 447 F.3d 1172, 1178 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Nixon v. Warner Communications, Inc., 435 U.S. 589, 597 & n.7 (1978)
- Foltz v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co., 331 F.3d 1122, 1135 (9th Cir. 2003)

OPINION

(PC) Rood v. Secretary

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

9 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10

11 COLTON JAMES ROOD, No. 1:22-cv-00449-SAB (PC)

12 Plaintiff, ORDER DENYING, WITHOUT PREJUDICE,
13 PLAINTIFF'S MOTION TO SEAL

14 v. DOCUMENTS

15 SECRETARY OF CDCR, et al., (ECF No. 86) 15 Defendants. 16 17 Plaintiff is proceeding pro
se and in forma pauperis in this civil rights action filed pursuant 18 to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. 19 On
May 9, 2025, Plaintiff filed a motion for a protective order to file two inmate 20 declarations under
seal. (ECF No. 86.) Plaintiff states that “the unredacted declarations contain 21 sensitive
information, including the full names and CDCR numbers of inmate witnesses who have 22
provided testimony regarding misconduct by correctional staff. Public disclosure of this 23
information could expose these individuals to retaliation or harm, thereby deterring them and 24
others from coming forward with similar information. Courts have recognized the need to protect
25 such individuals to ensure the integrity of the judicial process.” (Id. at 2.) 26 “Historically,
courts have recognized a ‘general right to inspect and copy public records 27 and documents,
including judicial records and documents.’ ” Kamakana v. City & City of 28 Honolulu, 447 F.3d
1172, 1178 (9th Cir. 2006) (quoting Nixon v. Warner Commc’ns, Inc., 435 1 U.S. 589, 597 & n.7
(1978)); see also Local Rule 141. 2 “A party seeking to seal a judicial record ... bears the burden of
overcoming the strong 3 presumption by meeting the ‘compelling reasons standard.” Kamakana,
447 F.3d at 1178 (quoting 4 Foltz v. State Farm Mutual Auto Ins. Co., 331 F.3d 1122, 1135 (9th
Cir. 2003). “Unless a 5 particular court record is one ‘traditionally kept secret,’ a ‘strong
presumption in favor of access’ 6 is the starting point.” Id. (citing Foltz, 331 F.3d at 1135.) To
meet this standard, the party must 7 “articulate compelling reasons supporting by specific factual
findings that outweigh the general 8 history of access and the public policies favoring disclosure,
such as the public interest in 9 understanding the judicial process.” Id. (internal citations and
quotations omitted). The court must 10 then “balance the competing interests of the public and the
party who seeks to keep certain 11 judicial records secret.” Id. When, the material is, at most,

“tangentially related to the merits of 12 the case,” the request to seal may be granted on a showing of “good cause.” Kamakana, 447 F.3d 13 at 1097. 14 Here, Plaintiff’s motion seeks to seal two declarations from CDCR inmates. It is not clear 15 from the content of the declarations whether they relate, in any way, to Plaintiff’s claims in this 16 action. Nonetheless, Plaintiff’s motion does not articulate specific reasons supporting filing the 17 declarations under seal. Nor does it provide “the statutory or other authority for sealing, the 18 requested duration, the identity, by name or category, of persons to be permitted access to the 19 documents, and all other relevant information” as required by Local Rule 141(b). Plaintiff has 20 simply indicated generally that sealing the declarations will protect the inmates from to 21 unidentified retaliation or harm. However, Plaintiff has not articulated specific reasons 22 supporting sealing each of the various items he requests be filed under seal. Therefore, the Court 23 finds that Plaintiff has not shown that the requested documents should be filed under seal. In 24 addition, as advised in the Court’s first informational order, “[t]he Court will not serve as a 25 repository for evidence. The parties may not file evidence (prison, disciplinary or medical 26 records, witness affidavits, etc.) with the Court until it becomes necessary to do so in connection 27 with a motion for summary judgment, trial or the Court requests otherwise. Evidence improperly 28 submitted to the Court may be stricken/returned.” (ECF No. 6 at 3.) Accordingly, Plaintiff’s 1 | motion will be denied without prejudice. In any renewed motion to file documents under seal, 2 | Plaintiff should articulate the reason each document should be filed under seal. 3 Based on the foregoing, it is HEREBY ORDERED that: 4 1. Plaintiffs motion to file documents under seal (ECF No. 86), is DENIED, without 5 prejudice; and 6 2. The Clerk of Court shall return the documents sought to be filed under seal dated May 7 9, 2025, to Plaintiff. 8

9 IT IS SO ORDERED. FA. ee

10 | Dated: _ May 27, 2025

STANLEY A. BOONE

11 United States Magistrate Judge 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28