

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Christopher P. White v. Tyson Havens, et al.

White v. Havens · No. 4:22-CV-01692 · Decided December 31, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania partially adopted and partially rejected a magistrate judge’s report and recommendation concerning defendants’ motion for summary judgment. The court denied summary judgment on Christopher P. White’s § 1983 malicious-prosecution claim because disputed declarations created genuine issues of material fact regarding probable cause and malice, but granted summary judgment on the civil-conspiracy claim for lack of evidence of concerted action. The court also declined to apply qualified immunity at the summary-judgment stage because factual disputes remained.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Matthew W. Brann
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	December 31, 2025
DOCKET	4:22-CV-01692
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff objected to a magistrate judge's report and recommendation recommending summary judgment for defendants in a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action alleging malicious prosecution and civil conspiracy. The district court reviewed the objections de novo, adopted the recommendation in part, rejected it in part, and ruled on defendants' motion for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the objected-to portions of the report and recommendation de novo and applied Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56's summary-judgment standard, viewing the facts and reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party. The court also held that qualified-immunity resolution is premature when material historical facts relevant to immunity remain disputed.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Christopher P. White v. Tyson Havens, Jonathan Rachael, Curt Loudenslager, Michael A. Caschera, III, Michael Simpler

TOPICS

section 1983 qualified immunity summary judgment fourth amendment civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil rights constitutional torts criminal procedure civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether competing declarations concerning whether White possessed or sold controlled substances created a genuine dispute of material fact regarding probable cause for the criminal prosecution.
2. Whether the evidence permitted a jury to find malice for purposes of White's § 1983 malicious-prosecution claim.
3. Whether White presented evidence of agreement and concerted action sufficient to sustain his § 1983 civil-conspiracy claim.
4. Whether defendants were entitled to qualified immunity at summary judgment despite disputed historical facts concerning whether Rachael fabricated evidence and prosecuted White without probable cause.

HOLDINGS

1. Summary judgment was inappropriate because the competing declarations created a genuine dispute of material fact as to whether Rachael had probable cause to initiate the criminal prosecution.
2. The motion for summary judgment was properly denied because, if a jury credited White's account, it could infer malice from the absence of probable cause and from alleged fabrication of testimony and a police report.
3. Defendants were entitled to summary judgment on the civil-conspiracy claim because White presented no evidence that the defendants agreed or acted in concert to maliciously prosecute him.
4. The court declined to apply qualified immunity at that time because disputed historical facts concerning whether Rachael fabricated evidence and prosecuted White without probable cause were material to the immunity analysis.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"The question is not whether, taking Rachael's affidavit as true, he had probable cause to pursue criminal charges against White." (Section III.A)

"To find in Defendants' favor on their motion would require the Court to exercise its own judgment to find Rachael more credible than White, which this Court cannot do." (Section III.A)

“At summary judgment, “a decision on qualified immunity will be premature when there are unresolved disputes of historical fact relevant to the immunity analysis.”” (Section III.C)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Detective Jonathan Rachael initiated state criminal proceedings against Christopher White for drug offenses based on Rachael's assertion that White sold him cocaine during a controlled purchase. The other officers conducting surveillance did not witness White enter Rachael's vehicle or observe the alleged transaction. White submitted a competing declaration stating that the transaction never occurred and that the charges were fabricated in retaliation for his refusal to become a confidential informant; White was later acquitted of the state charges.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

White filed a second amended complaint asserting malicious prosecution, conspiracy to maliciously prosecute, and Fourteenth Amendment due process claims arising from his arrest and subsequent acquittal on state drug charges. A prior motion to dismiss narrowed the case to a malicious prosecution claim against Detective Jonathan Rachael and a civil conspiracy claim against Rachael, Tyson Havens, Curt Loudenslager, Michael A. Caschera, III, and Michael Simpler. The defendants moved for summary judgment, and Chief Magistrate Judge Daryl F. Bloom recommended granting the motion. The district court granted summary judgment on the conspiracy claim but denied it on the malicious prosecution claim and declined to apply qualified immunity at the summary-judgment stage.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Equal Emp't Opportunity Comm'n v. City of Long Branch, 866 F.3d 93, 99 (3d Cir. 2017)
- EBC, Inc. v. Clark Bldg. Sys., Inc., 618 F.3d 253, 262 (3d Cir. 2010)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 250, 252 (1986)
- Betts v. New Castle Youth Dev. Ctr., 621 F.3d 249, 252 (3d Cir. 2010)
- Port Auth. of N.Y. & N.J. v. Affiliated FM Ins. Co., 311 F.3d 226, 233 (3d Cir. 2002)
- Razak v. Uber Techs., Inc., 951 F.3d 137, 144 (3d Cir. 2020)
- Weitzner v. Sanofi Pasteur Inc., 909 F.3d 604, 613-14 (3d Cir. 2018)
- Zimmerman v. Corbett, 873 F.3d 414, 418 (3d Cir. 2017)
- Karns v. Shanahan, 879 F.3d 504, 523 (3d Cir. 2018)
- United States v. Alexander, 54 F.4th 162, 171 (3d Cir. 2022)
- Gentles v. Borough of Pottstown, No. 22-2925, 2025 WL 2082645, at *4 (3d Cir. July 24, 2025)
- Lippay v. Christos, 996 F.2d 1490, 1502 (3d Cir. 1993)

- Kelley v. Gen. Teamsters, Chauffeurs & Helpers, Loc. Union 249, 544 A.2d 940, 941 (Pa. 1988)
- Emil Jutrowski v. Township of Riverdale, Jutrowski v. Township of Riverdale, 904 F.3d 280, 295 (3d Cir. 2018)
- Evans v. Newark City, 152 F.4th 537, 544-46 (3d Cir. 2025)
- Curley v. Klem, 298 F.3d 271, 278 (3d Cir. 2002)
- United States v. Brown, 631 F.3d 638, 649 (3d Cir. 2011)

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