

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Hayes v. Doe

Hayes · No. 25-cv-02356-EKL · Decided September 22, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California screens Kevin Lewis Hayes’s prisoner civil-rights complaint concerning the opening of outgoing legal mail outside his presence. The court finds a cognizable First Amendment claim against Corina Lopez, Ashalla Binning, Justin Garcia, Correctional Officer Robles, and Correctional Officer Partida, orders service, and establishes a briefing schedule for dispositive motions.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Eumi K. Lee
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	September 22, 2025
DOCKET	25-cv-02356-EKL
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Screening order in a prisoner civil-rights action under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, determining that the amended complaint states a cognizable First Amendment claim and ordering service on five defendants.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the Court must identify cognizable claims and dismiss claims that are frivolous or malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from an immune defendant. Pro se pleadings are liberally construed. A complaint must contain sufficient factual allegations to state a plausible claim for relief under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2).
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court screening order; persuasive only
PARTIES	Kevin Lewis Hayes v. John Doe, et al., Corina Lopez, Ashalla Binning, Justin Garcia, Correctional Officer Robles, Correctional Officer Partida

TOPICS

first amendment

prisoners rights

section 1983

service of process

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

constitutional law

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Hayes's allegations that prison officials opened properly marked outgoing legal mail outside his presence state a cognizable First Amendment claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
2. Whether the complaint should proceed to service against the identified defendants under the prisoner-screening requirements of 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.

HOLDINGS

1. Liberally construed, Hayes's allegations that defendants opened his outgoing legal mail addressed to the Los Angeles County Courthouse outside his presence state a cognizable First Amendment claim.
2. The action may proceed against Corina Lopez, Ashalla Binning, Justin Garcia, Correctional Officer Robles, and Correctional Officer Partida, and those defendants must be served through the specified CDCR e-service process.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“prisoners have a protected First Amendment interest in having properly marked legal mail opened only in their presence.” (at 2)

“Hayes states a cognizable First Amendment claim against all Defendants for the opening of his outgoing legal mail, which was addressed to the Los Angeles County Courthouse, outside his presence.” (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Hayes, a prisoner at the Correctional Training Facility, alleged that prison officials opened outgoing legal mail outside his presence. In particular, he alleged that mail addressed to attorneys, including mail directed to the Los Angeles County Courthouse, was opened, returned weeks later, and accompanied by notes asserting that the addressees or addresses were invalid. Hayes identified correctional officers and mailroom personnel whom he believed were involved and sought monetary and injunctive relief.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hayes filed the action on March 7, 2025, challenging incidents involving his legal mail at the Correctional Training Facility in Soledad, California. The Court granted his motion to amend on August 12, 2025, screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, found a cognizable First Amendment claim, ordered service, and established a dispositive-motion briefing schedule.

DISPOSITION

CASES CITED

- *Balistreri v. Pacifica Pol. Dep't*, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir. 1990)
- *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 679 (2009)
- *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- *Lemire v. Cal. Dep't of Corrections & Rehabilitation*, 726 F.3d 1062, 1074 (9th Cir. 2013)
- *Leer v. Murphy*, 844 F.2d 628, 633-34 (9th Cir. 1988)
- *Wolff v. McDonnell*, 418 U.S. 539, 576-77 (1974)
- *Royse v. Superior Court*, 779 F.2d 573, 574-75 (9th Cir. 1986)
- *Hayes v. Idaho Corr. Center*, 849 F.3d 1204, 1210-11, 1218 (9th Cir. 2017)
- *O'Keefe v. Van Boening*, [citation incomplete in source]
- *Rand v. Rowland*, 154 F.3d 952, 953-54, 960 (9th Cir. 1998) (en banc)
- *Wyatt v. Terhune*, 315 F.3d 1108, 1120 n.4 (9th Cir. 2003)
- *Woods v. Carey*, 684 F.3d 934, 940-41 (9th Cir. 2012)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 6 7
KEVIN LEWIS HAYES, Case No. 25-cv-02356-EKL 8 Plaintiff, ORDER SCREENING
COMPLAINT, 9 v. ORDERING SERVICE 10 JOHN DOE, et al., Defendants. 11 12 13 On March
7, 2025, Plaintiff Kevin Lewis Hayes filed the instant lawsuit challenging 14 incidents that
occurred at Correctional Training Facility in Soledad, California.

ECF No. 1. On 15 August 12, 2025, the Court granted Hayes' motion to amend his complaint.
ECF No. 5. The 16 Court reviews the complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915. Based on the
following reasons, the 17 Court ORDERS SERVICE of Defendants Corina Lopez, Ashalla
Binning, Justin Garcia, 18 Correctional Officer Robles, Correctional Officer Partida. 19 I. LEGAL
STANDARDS 20 A. Standard of Review 21 Federal courts engage in a preliminary screening of
cases in which prisoners seek redress 22 from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a
governmental entity.

28 U.S.C. 23 § 1915A(a). In its review, the Court must identify any cognizable claims and dismiss
any claims, 24 which are frivolous or malicious, fail to state a claim upon which relief may be
granted, or seek 25 monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. *Id.* §
1915A(b)(1)-(2). Pro se 26 pleadings must be liberally construed. *Balistreri v. Pacifica Pol.*

Dep't, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th 27 Cir. 1990). 1 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) requires
only “a short and plain statement of the 2 claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.”

Although a complaint “does not need detailed 3 factual allegations,... a plaintiff’s obligation to provide the ‘grounds’ of his ‘entitle[ment] to 4 relief’ requires more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a 5 cause of action will not do....

Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above 6 the speculative level.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (citations omitted). 7 A complaint must proffer “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Id.* 8 at 570. “While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be 9 supported by factual allegations.

When there are well-pleaded factual allegations, a court should 10 assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement to 11 relief.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 679 (2009). 12 B. Section 1983 13 To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that: (1) a right secured by 14 the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) the alleged deprivation was 15 committed by a person acting under the color of state law.

West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). 16 Liability may be imposed on an individual defendant under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 if the plaintiff can 17 show that the defendant’s actions actually and proximately caused the deprivation of a federally 18 protected right. *Lemire v. Cal. Dep’t of Corrections & Rehabilitation*, 726 F.3d 1062, 1074 (9th Cir. 2013); *Leer v. Murphy*, 844 F.2d 628, 634 (9th Cir.

1988). A person deprives another of a 20 constitutional right within the meaning of Section 1983 if he does an affirmative act, participates 21 in another’s affirmative act, or fails to perform an act that he is legally required to do, causing the 22 deprivation of which the plaintiff complains. *Leer*, 844 F.2d at 633. 23 II. HAYES’ ALLEGATIONS 24 Hayes alleges that he has experienced issues trying to send legal mail to attorneys since 25 2021.

ECF No. 1 at 4. Hayes alleges that he sent legal mail to a lawyer named Benjamin 26 Pavonca; the letter was later returned to Hayes, opened, with a note that the address – 600 W. 27 Broadway, Ste. 700, San Diego, CA 92101 – did not exist. *Id.* at 2. Hayes alleges that this 1 with a civil attorney. *Id.* at 3. 2 On May 16, 2024, Hayes wrote a letter to another attorney, Caneel Ciara Fraser, and 3 attempted to mail it to her by sending it to the Los Angeles County Courthouse located at 1945 S. 4 Hill St., Los Angeles, CA 90007.

ECF No. 1 at 3. Hayes alleges that he handed his legal mail to 5 correctional officers, who sealed the letter as legal mail, but the letter was then opened outside of 6 his presence. *Id.* The letter was returned to Hayes six weeks later from the mailroom. *Id.* The 7 letter was opened and had a note that “[Fraser] doesn’t exist and her address is frivolous.” *Id.* 8 Officers Robles and Partida placed the opened letter under Hayes’ door.

Id. at 36. When Hayes 9 asked the officers to sign something stating that the letter was opened by the mail room, the 10 officers refused to do so. Id. at 3. Hayes believes that the officers were involved in the opening of 11 his mail. Id. 12 Hayes believes that Fraser would have received the letter if it had been mailed as 13 addressed. ECF No. 1 at 3.

The attached grievance response shows that his grievance was denied 14 because the letter was addressed to “Camille Frazier” at the Los Angeles County Courthouse, but 15 the mail room reportedly determined that no person with that name was admitted to the California 16 State Bar. Id. at 42. When Hayes asked for the names of mail room staff who were responsible 17 for incoming and ongoing mail on the date the letter was opened, the prison provided the names of 18 Defendants Lopez, Binning, and Garcia.

ECF No. 4 at 4-5. 19 Hayes seeks monetary and injunctive relief. ECF No. 1 at 3. 20 III. ANALYSIS 21 Prison officials may institute procedures for inspecting “legal mail,” e.g., mail sent 22 between attorneys and prisoners, and mail sent from prisoners to the courts. See *Wolff v. 23 McDonnell*, 418 U.S. 539, 576-77 (1974) (incoming mail from attorneys); *Royse v. Superior 24 Court*, 779 F.2d 573, 574-75 (9th Cir.

1986) (outgoing mail to court). But “prisoner 25 correspondence at least implicates First Amendment rights[,]” and “prisoners have a protected 26 First Amendment interest in having properly marked legal mail opened only in their presence.” 27 *Hayes v. Idaho Corr. Center*, 849 F.3d 1204, 1210-11 (9th Cir. 2017); see also *O’Keefe v. Van 1 presence of the prisoner may have an impermissible “chilling” effect on the constitutional right to 2 petition the government).*

A plaintiff need not allege a longstanding practice of having his mail 3 opened outside his presence in order to state a claim for relief. *Hayes*, 849 F.3d at 1218 4 (allegation that protected mail was opened outside plaintiff’s presence on two separate occasions 5 sufficient to state First Amendment claim). Liberally construed, Hayes states a cognizable First 6 Amendment claim against all Defendants for the opening of his outgoing legal mail, which was 7 addressed to the Los Angeles County Courthouse, outside his presence.

See *Royse*, 779 F.2d at 8 574-75 (outgoing mail to court is legal mail and subject to inspection in inmate’s presence). 9 IV. CONCLUSION 10 The Court orders as follows: 11 1. Hayes states a cognizable First Amendment claim against all Defendants for the 12 opening of his legal mail outside his presence. 13 2. Defendants Corina Lopez, Ashalla Binning, Justin Garcia, Correctional Officer 14 Robles, and Correctional Officer Partida shall be served.

Service shall proceed under CDCR’s e- 15 service pilot program for civil rights cases from prisoners in CDCR custody. In accordance with 16 the program, the Clerk of the Court is directed to serve on CDCR via email the following 17 documents: the operative complaint (ECF No. 1),

the motion to amend (ECF No. 4), this order, a 18 CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver form, and a summons.

19 No later than forty-five (45) days after service of this order via email on CDCR, CDCR 20 shall provide the Court a completed CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver advising the Court 21 whether Defendants will be waiving service of process without the need for service by the United 22 States Marshal Service (USMS) or whether any Defendant declined to waive service.

CDCR also 23 shall provide a copy of the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver to the California Attorney 24 General's Office, which, within twenty-one (21) days of service, shall file with the Court a 25 waiver of service of process for the Defendants waiving service. 26 Upon receipt of the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver, the Clerk shall prepare for each 27 Defendant who has not waived service according to the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver a 1 of this order, summons, and operative complaint for service upon each Defendant who has not 2 waived service.

The Clerk also shall provide to the USMS a copy of the CDCR Report of E- 3 Service Waiver. 4 The Clerk shall also mail a copy of the operative complaint and a copy of this order to the 5 United State Attorney General's Office in San Francisco. Additionally, the Clerk shall mail a 6 copy of this order to Hayes. 7 3.

In order to expedite the resolution of this case, the Court orders the following 8 briefing schedule: 9 A. No later than 90 days from the date of service, Defendants will file a motion for 10 summary judgment or other dispositive motion.

The motion will be supported by 11 adequate factual documentation, shall conform in all respects to Federal Rule of 12 Civil Procedure 56, and will include as exhibits all records and incident reports 13 stemming from the events at issue. If Defendants are of the opinion that this case 14 cannot be resolved by summary judgment or other dispositive motion, they will so 15 inform the Court prior to the date the dispositive motion is due.

All papers filed 16 with the Court will be promptly served on the Hayes. 17 B. At the time the dispositive motion is served, Defendants will also serve, on a 18 separate paper, the appropriate notice or notices required by *Rand v. Rowland*, 154 19 F.3d 952, 953-54 (9th Cir. 1998) (en banc), and *Wyatt v. Terhune*, 315 F.3d 1108, 20 1120 n.4 (9th Cir. 2003). See *Woods v. Carey*, 684 F.3d 934, 940-41 (9th Cir.

21 2012) (*Rand* and *Wyatt* notices must be given at the time motion for summary 22 judgment or motion to dismiss for non-exhaustion is filed, not earlier); *Rand*, 154 23 F.3d at 960 (separate paper requirement). 24 C. Hayes' opposition to the dispositive motion, if any, will be filed with the Court and 25 served upon Defendants no later than twenty-eight (28) days from the date the 26 motion was served upon him.

Hayes must read the attached page headed 27 “NOTICE -- WARNING,” which is provided to him pursuant to *Rand v. Rowland*, 1 F.2d 409, 411-12 (9th Cir. 1988). If Defendants file a dispositive motion claiming 2 that Hayes failed to exhaust his available administrative remedies as required by 3 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), he should take note of the attached page headed “NOTICE -- 4 WARNING (EXHAUSTION),” which must be provided to him as required by 5 *Wyatt*, 315 F.3d at 1120 n.4.

6 D. If Defendants wish to file a reply brief, they shall do so no later than fourteen 7 (14) days after the opposition is served upon them. 8 E. The motion shall be deemed submitted as of the date the reply brief is due. Absent 9 a further order of the Court, no hearing will be held on the motion. 10 4. All communications by Hayes with the Court must be served on Defendants, or 11 Defendants’ counsel once counsel has been designated, by mailing a true copy of the document to 12 || Defendants or Defendants’ counsel.

13 5. Discovery may be taken in accordance with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. 14 || No further court order is required before the parties may conduct discovery. 3 15 6. It is Hayes’ responsibility to prosecute this case. Hayes must keep the Court a 16 || informed of any change of address by filing a separate paper with the Clerk headed “Notice of 3 17 Change of Address.” He also must comply with the Court’s orders in a timely fashion.

Failure to 18 do so may result in the dismissal of this action for failure to prosecute pursuant to Federal Rule of 19 Civil Procedure 41(b). 20 IT IS SO ORDERED. 21 Dated: September 22, 2025
22 23 Eumi K. Lee 24 United States District Judge 25 26 27 28