

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PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court screening order; persuasive only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

other

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)