

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Vlad Kroutik v. Natalie Rajic

Kroutik · No. 3:25-cv-02794 JLS (AHG) · Decided October 30, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of California denied the defendant’s motion to seal the action in its entirety, concluding that she had not shown compelling reasons to overcome the presumption of public access. The court held that the unlawful detainer action presented no basis for federal-question, civil-rights, or removal jurisdiction, remanded the case to San Diego Superior Court, and denied the defendant’s motion to dismiss and in forma pauperis application as moot.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
DECIDED	October 30, 2025
DOCKET	3:25-cv-02794 JLS (AHG)
DISPOSITION	remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant removed a California unlawful detainer action to federal district court and moved to seal the action, dismiss the complaint, and proceed in forma pauperis. The district court denied sealing and sua sponte remanded for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court independently examined its subject matter jurisdiction. Removal statutes are strictly construed, doubts concerning removal are resolved in favor of remand, and the removing defendant bears the burden of establishing that removal is proper. A party seeking to seal judicial records must overcome the applicable presumption of public access by satisfying the compelling-reasons standard when the records are more than tangentially related to the merits.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished, nonprecedential district-court order
PARTIES	Natalie Rajic v. Vlad Kroutik

TOPICS

- subject matter jurisdiction
- landlord tenant
- civil procedure
- motions to dismiss

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

removal jurisdiction

landlord-tenant law

public access to judicial records

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Defendant established federal-question jurisdiction over a state-law unlawful detainer action based on anticipated federal defenses or counterclaims.
2. Whether Defendant established jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1343.
3. Whether removal was proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1443 based on alleged violations of rights involving disability and familial status and alleged deficiencies in California state-court proceedings.
4. Whether Defendant demonstrated compelling reasons sufficient to seal the entire federal action.

HOLDINGS

1. The motion to seal the entire action was denied because Defendant failed to show compelling reasons that outweighed the public's strong right of access to judicial records, and the request was overbroad.
2. Federal-question jurisdiction did not exist because the complaint pleaded only a state-law California unlawful detainer claim, and anticipated federal defenses or counterclaims could not create federal-question jurisdiction.
3. Jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1343 was unavailable because the complaint did not assert an action to redress deprivation of constitutional or specified civil rights.
4. Removal under § 1443 was improper because Defendant did not assert rights protected by an explicit statutory enactment securing racial equality and did not show that California courts would refuse to enforce those rights.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Unless a particular court record is one ‘traditionally kept secret,’ a ‘strong presumption in favor of access’ is the starting point.” (at 3)

“Federal district courts are courts of limited jurisdiction that ‘may not grant relief absent a constitutional or valid statutory grant of jurisdiction’ and are ‘presumed to lack jurisdiction in a particular case unless the contrary affirmatively appears.’” (at 5)

“The removal statute is strictly construed, and any doubt about the right of removal requires resolution in favor of remand.” (at 5)

“Here, on the face of the Complaint, there is no federal question presented because the only cause of action is a state law unlawful detainer action.” (at 6)

“Accordingly, the Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction and REMANDS the case to Diego Superior Court, Case Number 25UD052994C.” (at 7)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Kroutik filed a California unlawful detainer action against Rajic seeking \$320.39 in unpaid rent and \$172.26 per day in damages beginning September 24, 2025. Rajic removed the action to federal court, asserting federal-question, civil-rights, and civil-rights-removal jurisdiction based on anticipated federal defenses and counterclaims involving housing, disability, familial status, and constitutional rights. She also sought to seal the entire action, including the complaint, notice of removal, motion to dismiss, and IFP application.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On October 2, 2025, Vlad Kroutik filed a limited civil unlawful detainer action in the Superior Court of California, County of San Diego, seeking unpaid rent and daily damages. Natalie Rajic removed the action on October 20, 2025, asserting federal-question jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1331, civil-rights jurisdiction under § 1343, and removal under § 1443. The federal court denied the motion to seal, remanded the case to state court for lack of subject matter jurisdiction, and denied the motion to dismiss and IFP application as moot.

DISPOSITION

remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The action was remanded to the Superior Court of California, County of San Diego, for further proceedings, based on lack of subject matter jurisdiction. The federal motion to dismiss and IFP application were denied as moot.

CASES CITED

- *Nixon v. Warner Commc'ns, Inc.*, 435 U.S. 589, 597-99 (1978)
- *Kamakana v. City & County of Honolulu*, 447 F.3d 1172, 1178-79 (9th Cir. 2006)
- *Foltz v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 331 F.3d 1122, 1130, 1135-36 (9th Cir. 2003)
- *Ctr. for Auto Safety v. Chrysler Grp., LLC*, 809 F.3d 1092, 1096-98, 1102 (9th Cir. 2016)
- *United States v. Amodeo*, 71 F.3d 1044, 1048 (2d Cir. 1995)
- *JBS Packerland, Inc. v. Phillips Cattle Co.*, No. 24-CV-1299-BAS-MSB, 2024 WL 4280960, at *1 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2024)
- *Phillips v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 307 F.3d 1206, 1210-11 (9th Cir. 2002)
- *Rock v. McHugh*, 819 F. Supp. 2d 456, 475 (D. Md. 2011)
- *Harrel v. Cal. Forensic Med. Grp., Inc.*, No. 15-CV-579 KJN P, 2015 WL 1405567, at *1 (E.D. Cal. Mar. 27, 2015)
- *Ellis-Sanders v. Guardian Piazza D'Oro LLC*, No. 25-CV-1379-JO-DDL, 2025 WL 1637043, at *1 (S.D. Cal. June 9, 2025)
- *Hanna v. Plumer*, 380 U.S. 460, 473-74 (1965)
- *Cooper v. Tokyo Elec. Power Co.*, 990 F. Supp. 2d 1035, 1038 (S.D. Cal. 2013)
- *A-Z Int'l v. Phillips*, 323 F.3d 1141, 1145 (9th Cir. 2003)
- *Hunter v. Philip Morris USA*, 582 F.3d 1039, 1042 (9th Cir. 2009)

- Gaus v. Miles, Inc., 980 F.2d 564, 566 (9th Cir. 1992)
- Moore-Thomas v. Alaska Airlines, Inc., 553 F.3d 1241, 1244 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Valdez v. Allstate Ins. Co., 372 F.3d 1115, 1116 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Vaden v. Discover Bank, 556 U.S. 49, 60 (2009)
- Holmes Group, Inc. v. Vornado Air Circulation Systems, Inc., 535 U.S. 826, 832 (2002)
- Muhammad v. N. Richmond Senior Hous., Inc., No. 3:15-cv-00629-WHO, 2015 WL 1154209, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 13, 2015)
- Wells Fargo Bank v. Lapeen, No. C 11-1932 LB, 2011 WL 2194117, at *3 (N.D. Cal. June 6, 2011)
- MH Southgate Invs., LLC v. Hernandez, No. 25-CV-1493, 2025 WL 2607632, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 25, 2025)
- JMK Properties, Inc. v. Heatherly, No. 25-CV-1961-RBM-JLB, 2025 WL 2639894, at *2 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 12, 2025)
- Robbins v. LDM-Properties, LLC, No. 22-CV-933, 2022 WL 1469425, at *2 (C.D. Cal. May 10, 2022)
- West Hollywood RE, LLC v. Weiss, No. CV 24-4692-JFW(PDx), 2024 WL 4003902, at *1 (C.D. Cal. June 17, 2024)
- Patel v. Del Taco, Inc., 446 F.3d 996, 998 (9th Cir. 2006)
- California v. Sandoval, 434 F.2d 635, 636 (9th Cir. 1970)
- BP P.L.C. v. Mayor & City Council of Baltimore, 593 U.S. 230 (2021)
- Bartlett v. Patera, No. 17-CV-6991-JSC, 2018 WL 10436644, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 8, 2018)
- State of Georgia v. Rachel, 384 U.S. 780, 792 (1966)
- Santi v. Batache, No. 21-CV-603-SB-PD, 2021 WL 425982, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Feb. 5, 2021)
- Hernandez v. Oliu, No. 14-cv-3924-SVW-FFMx, 2014 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 84554, at *3 (C.D. Cal. June 17, 2014)
- Vincent v. Evans, No. SA CV-16-43-JLS (KESx), 2016 WL 236203, at *2-3 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 20, 2016)