

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA, FORT WAYNE DIVISION

Coleman v. Thomas

Coleman · No. 1:25-CV-327-CCB-SJF · Decided January 12, 2026

SUMMARY

The court screened Kenneth Coleman's amended prisoner complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A concerning a strip search, x-rays, and body cavity search allegedly conducted after a rumor about him. The court held that the complaint was too vague to plausibly show that the named defendants violated his Fourth Amendment rights or were personally involved in the search. The court granted Coleman until February 16, 2026, to file a further amended complaint and cautioned that the action would otherwise be dismissed.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Cristal C. Brisco
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
DECIDED	January 12, 2026
DOCKET	1:25-CV-327-CCB-SJF
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Screening of a prisoner's amended civil-rights complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court must dismiss a prisoner's complaint that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant. On a motion-to-dismiss-like plausibility review, factual allegations are accepted as true, but the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to permit a reasonable inference that each defendant is liable.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion
PARTIES	Kenneth Coleman v. Brady Thomas, Brian Miller, Zack Shifflet, Joshua Carpenter

TOPICS

prisoners rights

civil rights

subject matter jurisdiction

pleadings

fourteenth amendment

PRACTICE AREAS

Prisoner civil rights

constitutional litigation

federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the amended complaint plausibly alleged that the search violated Coleman's Fourth Amendment right against unreasonable searches and seizures.
2. Whether the amended complaint adequately alleged the personal involvement of each named defendant.
3. Whether Coleman should be granted leave to amend rather than have the action dismissed immediately under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.

HOLDINGS

1. The amended complaint did not state a plausible Fourth Amendment claim because it lacked sufficient facts concerning the rumor, the justification for the search, the manner and circumstances of the search, and the defendants' involvement.
2. The amended complaint failed to state a claim against the named defendants because it did not allege facts identifying their personal participation in the search.
3. Coleman was granted leave to file another amended complaint because the court could not conclude that amendment would necessarily be futile at this early stage.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Searches “that expose an individual’s bare body and genitals are an extraordinary interference with privacy.””

“The amended complaint is short on facts, dates, and specifics about the search and how the defendants were involved in the search.”

“The amended complaint does not state a claim for which relief can be granted.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Coleman alleged that on June 12, 2025, jail personnel subjected him to a strip search, x-rays, and a body-cavity search after someone started a rumor about him. No contraband was found. Although he named the sheriff, a sergeant, a lieutenant, and a captain as defendants, the body of the amended complaint did not identify any of them or explain how they participated in the search.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Kenneth Coleman, a pretrial detainee proceeding without counsel, filed an amended complaint alleging that he was subjected to a strip search, x-rays, and a body-cavity search after a rumor was circulated about him. The

court screened the amended complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A and concluded that it was too vague to state a plausible claim against the named defendants. Rather than dismissing immediately, the court granted Coleman leave until February 16, 2026, to file a further amended complaint and cautioned that failure to respond would result in dismissal.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Brown v. Polk County, 965 F.3d 534, 537-38 (7th Cir. 2020)
- Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 559 (1979)
- Haro v. Porter County, 129 F.4th 992, 996 (7th Cir. 2025)
- Burks v. Raemisch, 555 F.3d 592, 596 (7th Cir. 2009)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 556, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Swanson v. Citibank, N.A., 614 F.3d 400, 403 (7th Cir. 2010)
- Abu-Shawish v. United States, 898 F.3d 726, 738 (7th Cir. 2018)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA FORT WAYNE
DIVISION KENNETH COLEMAN, Plaintiff, v. CAUSE NO. 1:25-CV-327-CCB-SJF BRADY
THOMAS, BRIAN MILLER, ZACK SHIFFLET, JOSHUA CARPENTER, Defendants.
OPINION AND ORDER Kenneth Coleman, a prisoner without a lawyer, filed an amended
complaint against DeKalb County Sheriff Brady Thomas, Sgt. Brian Miller, Lt.

Zack Shifflet, and Cpt. Joshua Carpenter. ECF 14. “A document filed pro se is to be liberally construed, and a pro se complaint, however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007) (quotation marks and citations omitted). Nevertheless, under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court must review the merits of a prisoner complaint and dismiss it if the action is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.

Coleman alleges that, on June 12, 2025, he was subjected to a strip search, x-rays, and a body cavity search after someone started a rumor about him. No contraband was located during the search. As a pretrial detainee, Coleman retains his Fourth Amendment rights against unreasonable searches and seizures. Brown v. Polk Cnty., 965 F.3d 534, 537–38 (7th Cir. 2020).

But the fact of his detention impacts what searches are reasonable under the Fourth Amendment. *Id.* Reasonableness is evaluated by “balancing ‘the need for the particular search against the invasion of personal rights that the search entails.’” *Id.* at 538 (quoting *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 559 (1979)). Relevant factors are “the scope of the particular intrusion, the manner in which it is conducted, the justification for initiating it, and the place in which it is conducted.” *Id.* (quoting *Bell*, 441 U.S. at 559).

Searches “that expose an individual’s bare body and genitals are an extraordinary interference with privacy.” *Haro v. Porter Cnty.*, 129 F.4th 992, 996 (7th Cir. 2025) (quotation marks omitted). “When a jail instead singles out individual detainees for strip searches, [courts] have held that such searches must be justified by reasonable suspicion.” *Id.* Coleman does not provide any information about the rumor that prompted this search, other than the name of the person who allegedly started the rumor.

Furthermore, while he has sued four individuals, the body of the amended complaint does not mention them by name at all. “[P]ublic employees are responsible for their own misdeeds but not for anyone else’s.” *Burks v. Raemisch*, 555 F.3d 592, 596 (7th Cir. 2009). Coleman’s complaint is far too vague to permit a plausible inference that Sheriff Brady Thomas, Sgt.

Brian Miller, Lt. Zack Shifflet, or Cpt. Joshua Carpenter violated Coleman’s privacy rights when he was searched on June 12, 2025. The amended complaint is short on facts, dates, and specifics about the search and how the defendants were involved in the search. A complaint must contain sufficient factual matter “to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level, on the assumption that all the allegations in the complaint are true (even if doubtful in fact).” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555 (quotation marks, citations and footnote omitted). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not shown—that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (quotation marks and brackets omitted).

Thus, “a plaintiff must do better than putting a few words on paper that, in the hands of an imaginative reader, might suggest that something has happened to her that might be redressed by the law.” *Swanson v. Citibank, N.A.*, 614 F.3d 400, 403 (7th Cir. 2010) (emphasis in original).

The amended complaint does not state a claim for which relief can be granted. If Coleman believes he can state a claim based on (and consistent with) the events described in this complaint, he may file an amended complaint because “[t]he usual standard in civil cases is to allow defective

pleadings to be corrected, especially in early stages, at least where amendment would not be futile.” Abu-Shawish v. United States, 898 F.3d 726, 738 (7th Cir.

2018). To file an amended complaint, he needs to write this cause number on a Pro Se 14 (INND Rev. 2/20) Prisoner Complaint form which is available from his law library. He needs to write the word “Amended” on the first page above the title “Prisoner Complaint” and send it to the court after he properly completes the form.

For these reasons, the court: (1) GRANTS Kenneth Coleman until February 16, 2026, to file an amended complaint; and (2) CAUTIONS Kenneth Coleman that, if he does not respond by the deadline, this case will be dismissed under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A without further notice because the current complaint does not state a claim for which relief can be granted. SO ORDERED on January 12, 2026. /s/Cristal C. Brisco CRISTAL C. BRISCO, JUDGE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT