

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

Meloniece Dukes v. Vando Holding Ltd.

Dukes · No. 25-02069 (JXN)(JRA) · Decided January 12, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of New Jersey dismissed without prejudice a pro se complaint brought by Meloniece Dukes against Vando Holding Ltd. concerning the alleged sale of Delta-8 hemp products to her minor child. The court held that Dukes lacked standing to assert claims belonging to her child and that a non-attorney parent may not represent a minor child pro se in federal court.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of New Jersey
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Julien Xavier Neals
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of New Jersey
DECIDED	January 12, 2026
DOCKET	25-02069 (JXN)(JRA)
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The court screened Plaintiff's Complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) in connection with her application to proceed in forma pauperis and dismissed the action without prejudice for lack of standing to assert claims on behalf of her minor child.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Sua sponte screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), with dismissal required when subject-matter jurisdiction is lacking under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(h)(3). The court accepted the Complaint's factual allegations as true solely for screening purposes.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion; persuasive authority only
PARTIES	Meloniece Dukes v. Vando Holding Ltd.

TOPICS

- standing
- civil procedure
- negligence
- consumer protection

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff had Article III standing to assert claims based on injuries allegedly suffered by her minor child.
2. Whether a non-attorney parent may represent a minor child pro se in federal court.
3. Whether the Complaint should be dismissed without prejudice when the claims were purportedly brought on behalf of the minor child.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff lacked standing to assert the claims in the Complaint because the alleged injuries were suffered by her minor child rather than by Plaintiff personally, and the claims were being pursued on the child's behalf.
2. A non-attorney parent may not represent the parent's minor child pro se in federal court.
3. The Complaint was dismissed without prejudice.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“However, while Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 17(c) allows guardians to sue on behalf of minor children in their representative capacities, and litigants may represent themselves in federal court pro se under 28 U.S.C. § 1654, the Third Circuit has consistently held that a non-attorney parent may not represent his or her child pro se in federal court.” (Discussion section)

“For the reasons stated above, Plaintiff’s Complaint (ECF No. 1) is DISMISSED without prejudice.” (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged that her seventeen-year-old child, A.M.G., purchased Delta-8 hemp products containing THC from Defendant's website on December 26, 2024. She claimed the website used inadequate age-verification measures, allowing the sale and consumption of the products by a minor. Plaintiff asserted negligence and unfair and deceptive trade-practices claims based on alleged exposure to and consumption of an illegal substance, seeking \$500 million in compensatory damages.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed the action on March 25, 2025, alleging negligence and unfair and deceptive trade practices arising from Defendant's alleged sale of Delta-8 hemp products to Plaintiff's minor child. The court conducted sua sponte screening under the in forma pauperis statute and dismissed the Complaint without prejudice because the pro se parent could not represent the child's claims in federal court.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 32 (1992)
- Brown v. Sage, 941 F.3d 655, 660, 662 (3d Cir. 2019)
- Seneca Resources Corp. v. Township of Highland, 863 F.3d 245, 252 (3d Cir. 2017)
- Ehleiter v. Grapetree Shores, Inc., 482 F.3d 207, 211 (3d Cir. 2007)
- Sprint Communications Co., L.P. v. APCC Services, Inc., 554 U.S. 269, 273 (2008)
- Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife, 504 U.S. 555, 560-61 (1992)
- Valley Forge Christian College v. Americans United for Separation of Church & State, Inc., 454 U.S. 464, 472 (1982)
- Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp., 429 U.S. 252, 263 (1977)
- Kowalski v. Tesmer, 543 U.S. 125, 129-30 (2004)
- Powers v. Ohio, 499 U.S. 400, 411 (1991)
- Osei-Afriyie by Osei-Afriyie v. Medical College of Pennsylvania, 937 F.2d 876, 882-83 (3d Cir. 1991)
- Cheung v. Youth Orchestra Foundation of Buffalo, Inc., 906 F.2d 59, 61 (2d Cir. 1990)
- Watson v. Washington Township Public School District, No. 09-3650, 2010 WL 2540180, at *3 (D.N.J. June 17, 2010), *aff'd*, 413 F. App'x 466, 468 (3d Cir. 2011)
- Cole v. Montague Board of Education, 145 F. App'x 760, 762 n.1 (3d Cir. 2005)
- Harris-Thomas v. Christina School District, 145 F. App'x 714, 715 (3d Cir. 2005)
- Pinkney v. City of Jersey City Department of Housing & Economic Development, 42 F. App'x 535, 536 (3d Cir. 2002)
- Wolf v. Escala, No. 14-5985, 2015 WL 2403106, at *8 (D.N.J. May 20, 2015)
- Woodruff ex rel. B.W. v. Hamilton Township Public School, No. 06-3815, 2007 WL 4556968, at *2-3 (D.N.J. Dec. 20, 2007)

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