

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
TENNESSEE, COLUMBIA DIVISION

Aholusi J. Pillow v. Wellmed Management Inc. and Jennifer Gardner

No. 1:25-cv-00069 (M.D. Tenn. Mar. 23, 2026) · No. 1:25-cv-00069 · Decided March 23, 2026

SUMMARY

The court grants Aholusi J. Pillow leave to proceed in forma pauperis but dismisses the complaint as duplicative of a previously filed, still-pending case involving the same core employment-related allegations. The court denies as moot the plaintiff’s motion to vacate an arbitration award and the defendant’s motion to dismiss. The court also declines to certify that an appeal would be taken in good faith and directs entry of judgment.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Columbia Division
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Columbia Division
DECIDED	March 23, 2026
DOCKET	1:25-cv-00069
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se plaintiff filed an employment-discrimination complaint and an application to proceed in forma pauperis. The district court granted in forma pauperis status, conducted the required initial screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), dismissed the complaint as duplicative and frivolous, and denied the pending motions as moot.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), the court must dismiss an in forma pauperis action that is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant. The failure-to-state-a-claim inquiry applies the plausibility standard applicable to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6).
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Aholusi J. Pillow v. Wellmed Management Inc., Jennifer Gardner

TOPICS

civil procedure

motions to dismiss

employment discrimination

retaliation

sexual harassment

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

employment law

civil rights

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Pillow qualified to proceed in forma pauperis under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a).
2. Whether the complaint was duplicative of Pillow's earlier pending action and therefore frivolous and subject to dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).
3. Whether the pending motion to vacate an arbitration award and request for a jury trial, and the defendant's motion to dismiss and oppose vacatur, remained justiciable after dismissal of the duplicative action.

HOLDINGS

1. Pillow's application to proceed in forma pauperis was granted because his financial circumstances showed that he could not pay the civil filing fee without undue hardship.
2. The complaint was duplicative of Pillow v. Wellmed Medical Management, Inc., Case No. 1:23-cv-00059, and was therefore dismissed as frivolous under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).
3. Pillow's motion to vacate the arbitration award and request for a jury trial, and Wellmed's motion to dismiss and deny vacatur, were denied as moot.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Duplicative cases are considered legally frivolous.”

“The instant case, therefore, is DISMISSED as frivolous.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Pillow, an African American male who had worked for Wellmed for more than seven years, alleged that during training for a Senior Claims Specialist position, a female trainer made sexual comments about African American men. After Pillow complained to Human Resources, he alleged that the trainer failed to obtain technical support, causing him to fall behind, and that Wellmed later failed to approve a transfer waiver and issued performance warnings. Pillow claimed resulting losses of pay increases and bonuses, and brought substantially the same employment-related allegations in an earlier action that remained pending and had been stayed for arbitration.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Pillow filed this action against Wellmed Management Inc. and Jennifer Gardner, asserting employment discrimination, sexual harassment, retaliation, hostile work environment, and wrongful termination. He simultaneously sought leave to proceed in forma pauperis and later moved to vacate an arbitration award and requested a jury trial. The court granted in forma pauperis status, determined that the action duplicated Pillow's still-pending prior action, dismissed the case as frivolous, and denied the motions as moot.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324 (1989)
- Adkins v. E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., 335 U.S. 331, 339, 342 (1948)
- Foster v. Cuyahoga Department of Health and Human Services, 21 F. App'x 239, 240 (6th Cir. 2001)
- Ongori v. Hawkins, No. 16-2781, 2017 WL 6759020, at *1 (6th Cir. Nov. 15, 2017)
- Hill v. Lappin, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Tackett v. M & G Polymers, USA, LLC, 561 F.3d 478, 488 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Church Joint Venture, L.P. v. Blasingame, 817 F. App'x 142, 146 (6th Cir. 2020)
- Ellis v. Gallatin Steel Co., 390 F.3d 461, 479 (6th Cir. 2004)
- Waad v. Farmers Insurance Exchange, 762 F. App'x 256, 261 (6th Cir. 2019)
- Curtis v. Citibank, N.A., 226 F.3d 133, 138-39 (2d Cir. 2000)
- Twaddle v. Diem, 200 F. App'x 435, 438 (6th Cir. 2006)
- MPawinayo v. Rothwell, No. 3:22-CV-00545, 2022 WL 16825171, at *2 (M.D. Tenn. Nov. 8, 2022)
- Peoples v. Reno, No. 00-1086, 2000 WL 1477502, at *1 (6th Cir. 2000)
- Houston v. Caruso, No. 2:08-CV-124, 2009 WL 579411, at *1 (W.D. Mich. Mar. 5, 2009)
- Bailey v. Johnson, 846 F.2d 1019, 1021 (5th Cir. 1988)
- Hahn v. Tarnow, No. 06-CV-12814, 2006 WL 2160934 (E.D. Mich. July 31, 2006)